MEDITATIONS ON THE TRUTHS OF ETERNITY

In his Encyclical Letter On Promoting the more extended use of Spiritual Exercises, *given on the 20th December,* 1929, *Pope Pius XI expresses his earnest desire to see the Spiritual Exercises "daily extended more widely, not only among the clergy, both secular and religious, but also among the multitudes of the Catholic laity."*

His Holiness stresses the great benefits that may be derived, in the times in which we now live, from these sacred exercises in turning our thoughts to Eternal Truths, *to the examination of "those most grave and penetrating questions concerning the origin and the destiny of man."*

The Encyclical specially and warmly commends the method introduced by St. Ignatius of Loyola, *whom Pope Pius XI has himself been pleased to declare and constitute the "*Heavenly Patron of all Spiritual Exercises."

MEDITATIONS

ON THE

TRUTHS OF ETERNITY

FOR THE USE OF THOSE WHO DESIRE TO PERFORM THE
SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS

BY
FATHER JOSEPH PERGMAJER
OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

Translated from the Italian

LONDON AND DUBLIN
BROWNE AND NOLAN LIMITED
1930

6714

Made and printed in Ireland by
Browne and Nolan, Ltd., Dublin

A.M.D.G.

TO THE

EVER IMMACULATE MOTHER OF GOD

AND TO

HER HOLY GUARDIAN ST. JOSEPH,

THE

FOLLOWING TRANSLATION IS PRESENTED,

WITH

FILIAL REVERENCE AND WITH DEEP GRATITUDE

FOR PAST FAVOURS,

THAT THIS HUMBLE OFFERING, HOWEVER WORTHLESS

IN ITSELF, MAY, UNDER

THEIR BENIGN PATRONAGE, BECOME CONDUCIVE

TO THE

CONVERSION OF SINNERS, THE PRACTICE OF EXALTED

VIRTUE, THE SALVATION OF SOULS,

AND THE

GREATER GLORY OF GOD.

Nihil Obstat:

JOANNES CANONICUS WATERS,
Censor Theol. Deput.

Imprimi potest:

✠ EDUARDUS,
Archiep. Dublinen., Hiberniae Primas.

Dublini, 4° *Feb.* 1930.

PREFACE

THE little volume entitled "Meditations on the Truths of Eternity," now presented to the public, is one of the many invaluable works, composed by the Rev. Father Joseph Pergmajer, a German, of the Society of Jesus. Such was the humility of our author, that he never published any of his works, except the life of the servant of God, Philip Jenningen, which was written in Latin and German, and printed in obedience to the orders of his Superiors. But after his death his manuscripts were collected and arranged for publication, not only with a view to gratify those who wished to profit by them, but also that so many memorials of his learning and piety might not be lost to posterity. We know little of the edifying life of this saintly man; suffice it to say, he was considered most enlightened and experienced in the guidance of souls. He was confessor for twelve years to the Visitation Nuns of Bavaria, who, under his guidance, made great progress in the virtues of their holy state. All his labours were directed to the welfare of others, and in order to draw down the blessing of God upon them he practised many corporal austerities. He preached to the people with great zeal, and wrote short treatises with a view to withdraw them from sin and lead them to the practice of virtue. The task of writing, however, cost him much, as he suffered habitually from a contraction of the nerves and sinews of the right hand.

From the perusal of the following pages, the reader may form some idea of the saintly character of this holy man, and how deeply his mind was penetrated by the truths and virtues of our holy religion. He appeals with earnestness to the best feelings of the human heart, he furnishes strong motives to enable the Christian to triumph over corrupt nature, and he suggests means wherewith to purify the soul from its vices and smallest imperfections, that it may thus be prepared for a close and intimate union with God, the only true happiness attainable on earth, and a foretaste of the bliss enjoyed by the saints in heaven.

The following Meditations treat of the *Purgative*, *Illuminative*, and *Unitive States*, and are so connected as to lead the soul, by successive degrees, directly to the end St. Ignatius proposed to himself in his Spiritual Exercises. To these Meditations are added practical Examens, composed by the same author, on the actual state of a soul tending to Sanctity. These are arranged for each day, and may serve to facilitate the attainment of that perfection to which religious persons are specially bound to aspire.

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DIRECTIONS

FOR THE DUE PERFORMANCE OF THE

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

BEFORE COMMENCING THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

On the eve of the Retreat, visit the most holy Sacrament, and fervently recommend to Jesus Christ the important affair you are about to undertake. Be ready to make to God, generously, every sacrifice He may require of you, and with great fervour say, "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready."

DURING THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Make a particular examen on the manner in which you have performed the exercises allotted to each hour of the day, and on the duty of observing the silence and solitude which are strictly enjoined.

Observe, likewise, all the other practices prescribed, and be careful neither to lengthen nor abridge the time assigned to each, whether the soul be in a state of consolation or aridity, as, on fidelity to all, even the least observances of the retreat, depends the abundance of divine grace, and the fruit to be derived from the Spiritual Exercises.

At the commencement of the meditation, place yourself in the presence of God, and make an act of

faith such as the following: "O most holy and undivided Trinity, one God in three divine Persons, I firmly believe that Thou art here really and truly present. I adore Thee, and humbly beg Thy grace and assistance to make this meditation in the manner most pleasing to Thee."

During the time of meditation, be not satisfied with vague and general purposes, but make, with regard to the past, present, and future, such particular resolutions as your circumstances and the actual state and dispositions of your soul require. You should resolve to make due satisfaction to God for past sins, by true contrition, sacramental confession, daily examination of conscience, works of penance, and the use of Indulgences. Frequently repeat, during the day, the following aspiration: "Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquities, and cleanse me from my sins." With regard to the present, resolve to perform your daily devotions, and the duties of your state of life, as also to practise obedience, both exterior and interior, so exactly, that every duty, from morning to night, may be done in a manner pleasing to God, protesting that your only desire is in all things to do His holy will. The soul should place herself, as to the future, entirely at the disposal of divine Providence, and abandon every other wish or desire, except that of perfectly accomplishing the holy will of God. Whether she receive from God consolation or spiritual delights, or pass her life amidst crosses and desolation, let her alike give praise and thanks to His holy name. "Lord, here burn, here mutilate, but spare me for eternity."

After each exercise it would be well to give to your spiritual director an account of the manner in which

you have performed it, and if you have not already done so, to make known to him the state of your soul, your interior and exterior trials and temptations, and the lights and graces you may have received.

AFTER THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

At the close of your Retreat, set apart one day in each month for the purpose of renewing your resolutions, and examining how you have kept them. This examination should be made with great fervour on the following points:—Your spiritual exercises—the duties of your state of life—obedience—works of penance—and on the mortification of your will and senses, especially the eyes, the ears, and the tongue. You should likewise examine if you have omitted any duty, or performed it reluctantly, through custom, or without any desire of pleasing God. The Holy Ghost says of those who do the work of the Lord negligently, "Their works shall be scattered, and they themselves shall be condemned to the flames." Lastly, you should ask pardon of God for the many faults you have committed, and implore anew His grace to keep more faithfully, during the following month, the promises and resolutions you have made.

INSTRUCTIONS

HOW TO PROFIT BY THE

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

To derive fruit from the Spiritual Exercises, two things are essentially necessary ; first, the grace and assistance of God, without which we can do nothing ; and secondly, our own co-operation, by fidelity and fervour in the discharge of every duty prescribed. The first means to obtain both of these is humble and fervent prayer. Whilst assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, offer to the Eternal Father, at the Elevation, the merits of His only Son, that you may obtain the grace and assistance of which you stand in need. Renew this petition every time you visit the most Holy Sacrament, and frequently raise your heart to God during the day, by fervent ejaculatory prayers. In the next place, you must aim at great purity of heart, and endeavour to avoid even the least deliberate venial sin. God delights to dwell in pure souls, and to such He abundantly communicates His choicest gifts and favours.

Next to purity of heart, solitude and the exact observance of silence are requisite. You should not converse with anyone except your confessor or spiritual director ; you should likewise dismiss every distracting thought, in order, that while the body is in solitude, the soul, by faith, may be continually in the presence of God.

To the means just prescribed may be added, a prudent, but well-regulated practice of mortification. You would do well during this time, to increase your corporal penances, such, for instance, as to abstain from something at meals, etc.; nor should you neglect any opportunity afforded you, of practising this virtue. Let everything, however, be done with discretion, and the advice of your spiritual director, in obeying whom, you will do what will be most beneficial to your soul and pleasing to God.

Great generosity of heart is of the utmost importance. It comprises two things: first, a firm resolution to acquit yourself of all the exercises enjoined, as fervently as if on them alone depended the glory of God and the salvation of your soul; and secondly, a determined will not to refuse any sacrifice that God may require of you, but to endeavour to do implicitly all that you know would be pleasing to Him. If you faithfully observe the foregoing instructions, God will most assuredly impart to you his most abundant graces.

PREPARATORY MEDITATION

FOR THE EVE OF A RETREAT

On our Past Life

For many years the barren fig-tree produced only leaves. The lord of the vineyard, therefore, ordered it to be cut down, but the dresser of the vineyard interposed, and obtained that another year might be granted to it, in the hope that at length it would bear fruit. Whence comes the barrenness of this tree? It was planted in a good soil, and in a well-kept vineyard; the trees around it brought forth fruit; like them, it was watered with the dew of heaven. Why, then, was it barren?

This tree is the emblem of a tepid Religious, from whom God has long expected the fruit of good works. The Earth, that is the Institute, is holy; the dew of divine grace has never ceased to descend, so that this Religious, like so many others, might have produced abundant fruit. But she alone remains barren. Others daily deny themselves, never seek their own ease, study incessantly to eradicate from the heart every desire of vain-glory, endure in silence every trial and contradiction, and thus accumulate greater merit, than if they passed many hours in prayer, and were even favoured with ecstacies.

The fervent Religious converses with seculars only

when required to do so by duty or obedience. Her will is in all things conformable to that of God. She walks continually in His divine presence, is ever united to Him, and perpetually enjoys that interior peace which is the result of this intimate union. The tepid Religious, on the other hand, prefers her own gratification to the union of her soul with God ; and if she fail in the accomplishment of her desires, she murmurs and complains. To her the time of prayer appears long, for in this exercise she finds no consolation. She is a stranger to self-denial, and never does violence to nature on any occasion. If God visit her with affliction, she knows not how to endure it patiently, and as her heart is engrossed with the things of the earth, she can never for one moment taste that interior peace which is the reward of fervour in the service of God. What retribution may not such a soul expect ? She has reason to dread the following chastisements. On account of her tepidity, God may permit her to lose the grace of religious vocation, because by withdrawing daily more and more from God, she will at last become weary of the Religious state, which she will ultimately abandon, if not in body, at least in mind and heart. Again, God may possibly chastise her by an unprovided death, the tepid soul being generally unprepared for that awful moment. Finally, God may withdraw from her His special lights, and thus, having to encounter new difficulties every instant, she will rush headlong to her own ruin.

Tepid souls withdraw from God, first, by a want of fervour in the discharge of spiritual duties ; secondly, by the disrelish they feel for these duties, which disrelish they fail not to communicate to the other

Religious by murmurs and complaints; thirdly, by endeavouring to persuade themselves that they are not bound to aspire to perfection, and that the exact observance of rule is vain scrupulosity. Hence, the graces necessary to enlighten them on the duties and obligations of their state are withheld, and they are deprived of every consolation which would facilitate their attainment to perfection.

Examine, therefore, most diligently the state of your soul, and should you discover in yourself these fatal symptoms, weigh attentively the following truths. First, this retreat may, perhaps, be the last which God, ever desirous of your eternal salvation, has, in His infinite mercy, vouchsafed to grant you. Secondly, perhaps, during these days God will bestow on you the last grace you are to receive; and finally, these spiritual exercises may be the last means God will employ to move your heart. Resolve, therefore, to perform them with the greatest possible exactitude and fervour.

Accept, O my Redeemer, the offering I now make Thee of my whole being. Graciously hear my supplications, grant me the grace of self-knowledge and hearty contrition for all the sins of my past life, that when I shall appear before Thee in judgment, I may find mercy in Thy sight. Let my spirit rest in Thy sacred wounds. My soul pants after Thee, O Lord; deign graciously to regard the desires of my heart and grant, that after having perfectly fulfilled Thy divine will on earth, I may be eternally united to Thee in heaven. Amen.

FUNDAMENTAL

MEDITATION

First Day

THE object of the meditations of this day is to impress upon the mind the end of your creation, which is, to love and serve God on earth, and to enjoy and possess him eternally in heaven; likewise to stimulate you to tend to this end with all the powers of your soul.

FIRST MEDITATION

On the End of Man

FIRST POINT

The great duty of man is to love and serve God with his whole heart. Now reflect on your origin and existence. A thousand years ago you had no being. In the course of time, God, in His merciful designs, drew you forth from nothing, and formed for you a body animated with an immortal soul. You are thus a masterpiece of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. God, who is infinitely wise, has created all things for an end worthy of His greatness; therefore, in creating you, He had solely in view that you should know, love, and serve Him on earth, and enjoy Him eternally in heaven. Hence, to God belongs every power of your soul, every faculty of your mind, every sense of

your body, all of which should be employed in His service and for His glory.

Let us suppose for a moment that you were created what you now are, but wanting some sense or member, the use of speech, for example, and that an angel is deputed on the part of God to say to you, "The power of speech, of which you have hitherto been deprived, will now be granted you, but on one condition, namely, that you henceforth employ your tongue solely in praising and blessing your Creator." With what rapture would you not hail the Heavenly messenger! With what joy accept the conditions! You are now equally bound to employ your tongue, and all the senses of your body and faculties of your mind, in the love and service of Him from whom you have received all you possess.

The supreme dominion of God over His creatures being absolute likewise demands it. The proprietor of an orchard is undoubtedly entitled to the produce thereof, nor can anyone presume to appropriate the same without being guilty of theft. God being your Creator and Sovereign Lord, to whom you are indebted for every gift of grace and nature you enjoy, has an inalienable right to all the affections of your heart, and therefore your every thought, word, and action should be directed to His greater honour and glory. Consider how you have hitherto fulfilled these obligations. In two ways you may have failed in the discharge of them:

1. By omitting those duties you owe to God as your Master, or by performing them negligently.

2. By doing with full deliberation what you know would be displeasing to God. With what does your conscience reproach you on these two points?

Affections

My past life, O my God, is a tissue of sins and infidelities! instead of having directed to Thee all the affections of my heart, my every word and action, I have lavished them on creatures and forgotten Thee. This, however, is the least part of my guilt, for, alas! the greater portion of my life has been spent at enmity with Thee. Deign, in Thy infinite mercy, to pardon me all my past sins, especially my base ingratitude to Thee, my want of love for Thee, and my indifference in Thy service. Grant that, henceforth, every moment of my life may be consecrated to Thy greater honour and glory. Would it were in my power to recall those precious but misspent hours, which might have been made so available for my sanctification!

SECOND POINT

Consider the advantages to be derived from serving God, and loving Him with your whole heart. God, in creating you, had not only in view that you should love and serve Him whilst on this earth, but that you should also reign with Him eternally in heaven, and this you will most assuredly do, if you faithfully co-operate with His merciful designs in your regard.

The mind of man can form no just idea of the infinite happiness which God has prepared in the kingdom of heaven for His elect. The following considerations, however, may serve to give some idea of it. God is a Being infinitely great and infinitely happy, and His happiness is eternal. By a miracle of love, man is destined to partake of this same happiness, which shall be as unchangeable as God Himself. The

Apostle tells us, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered the heart of man to conceive, the things God has prepared for those who love Him."—1 *Cor.* ii. 9.

How different from the vain and fleeting joys of life, will be the never-ending happiness of the saints in heaven! Where are the kings and queens who flourished a century ago, who possessed extensive dominions, great riches and power, and all that the heart of man could desire, who received the homage, almost to worship, of millions of subjects? They were esteemed happy, and their enjoyments lasted for a certain time. Where are they now?—They are now in the silent tomb, their bones mouldering to dust, and trampled upon regardlessly by the humblest individual. At the present day, monarchs, whose favour is universally courted, govern the earth, but of whom, a hundred years hence, nothing will remain save a handful of dust. The kingdom to which the child of God aspires is very different; its glory and splendour will never end. The possession of God—the sweet embraces of Jesus—the tender love and intimate friendship of the ever Immaculate Mother of God and of all the angels and saints—the pure and transporting joys of heaven, which constitute the happiness of the elect—all, all are eternal, immutable.

Affections

A God of infinite goodness has created me for heaven, which is my country, my inheritance, my reward, and my last end. If I love and serve Him the brightness of my glory will one day surpass that of the sun and moon. I shall behold the heavenly Jerusalem,

possess my Jesus, and be inebriated with a torrent of delights. Jesus Himself has promised me this glory. I, therefore, confidently hope for it. But, alas! how is it that I, an heir to the kingdom of heaven, destined to enjoy its purest delights, to be loved by God and all His angels and saints for all eternity, seek the vain pleasures of the world, am afflicted at sickness and sorrow, and shrink from contempt and humiliations?

THIRD POINT

Consider how necessary it is to serve God, and to love Him with your whole heart. In creating you, God had in view His own honour and glory, and He will infallibly attain this end.

God, who is infinitely good, will reward with eternal happiness all who shall have faithfully loved and served Him while on earth; but He is likewise infinite in His justice, and must necessarily punish with eternal torments those who reject or contemn His love. Reflect seriously upon the following truths. You have been created for heaven, where your sole occupation will be to render unceasingly to God your tribute of love, praise, adoration, and thanksgiving; if, however, you stray from your last end by neglecting to love God, you will be condemned to the unquenchable flames of hell, where you will curse and blaspheme His adorable name for all eternity. In either case, God will be equally glorified in you. Imagine you see the heavens opened, and that you behold the transcendent glory of the elect; imagine again, that at your feet the fathomless gulf of hell opens, and discloses to you its horrors and the torments of the damned, and reason thus with yourself: "I must

necessarily glorify God for eternity. This decree is immutable. Terrible mystery! Hell or heaven must be my dwelling for ever. I will either love and praise God eternally in heaven, or blaspheme Him in hell, the flames of which have been created by an outraged and offended God, to chastise the victims of His justice. This corruptible body will one day be clothed in immortality; with these very hands and these eyes I shall embrace and contemplate the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ. I shall likewise behold the glory of His saints, and be inundated with a torrent of delights, or this body will burn eternally in the flames of hell, my hands chained with its sad fetters, and my eyes tortured with the sight of its hideous spectres. The doubt whether I shall love or hate God for eternity, makes me tremble. The choice, however, depends upon myself."

I know not if I shall be saved, but I know for certain, Thou my God hast said, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and he that will lose his life for My sake shall find it."—*Luke* ix. 24. Salvation depends upon the mortification of the passions of pride, anger, self-will, and sensuality, and also upon cultivating the virtues of generosity to God, mortification of the will and senses, self-denial, humility, and charity. How have I hitherto practised these virtues? I hear the words of Jesus Christ condemn me, as I am conscious of having made little or no progress in them.

Affections

How is it possible, O my God, that I have hitherto been so regardless of the end of my creation, on the attainment of which depends my eternal happiness!

Were I to endure all imaginable evils, nay, even to sacrifice my life, I should have done and suffered but little to gain heaven. I resolve, O my God, in future, to labour for the attainment of my last end, cost what it may. Enable me to correspond faithfully with the lights and graces Thou shalt deign to bestow upon me during this holy time of Retreat.

I have often made good resolutions and as frequently failed in them, nor can I hope to fulfil them without the special aid of Thy divine grace. I have recourse to Thee, O my God. With an humble and contrite heart, I beseech Thee to pardon all the sins and negligences of my past life. Regard not my unworthiness, deal not with me according to the rigour of Thy justice, but according to the plenitude of Thy tender mercies. Enlighten me, that I may thoroughly understand the importance of my last end. Inflame my heart with Thy love, and grant me the great gift of final perseverance. If, O Eternal Father, I am to be lost, what will it avail me to have been created by Thee, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and sanctified by the grace of the Holy Ghost?

SECOND MEDITATION

On the End of a Religious

FIRST POINT

Are you thoroughly impressed with the exalted dignity of the Religious state? As a spouse of Jesus Christ, you are bound to love and serve God with greater perfection than persons in the world, and you are destined by Him to receive a higher degree of

glory in heaven. Consider, therefore, the advantages annexed to your state.

If you lead a life conformable to the sanctity of your state you cannot entertain the slightest doubt of your eternal salvation. To doubt on this point would be an injury done to God, who, by the mouth of Jesus Christ, has declared, " everyone who has left house and brethren and sisters, or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting."—*Matt.* xix. 29. These words were uttered by a God of infinite truth, who is infinitely faithful to His promises. Could any thought be more consoling ?

When God called you to the Religious state, He destined you for sanctity and intimate union with Himself. He desired that you should give Him your entire heart, centre all your thoughts and affections in Him, converse familiarly with Him, and be always recollected in His divine presence. The end God proposed to Himself in withdrawing you from the world, and leading you into solitude, was, that He alone might possess your heart, in order to inflame it with His holy love, and mould it by degrees into a worthy dwelling for Himself, where He with you and you with Him might enjoy the sweetest and most familiar intercourse.

In heaven the elect are princes, and each one enjoys an infinite beatitude. But there is as much difference in the glory of each, as there is between the splendour of the sun and that of the smallest planet. Religious souls are destined to attain a much more eminent degree of glory, than myriads of the elect. " If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast and give to the

poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come follow Me."—*Matt.* xix. 21. Imagine you behold an heir apparent to the throne, lying a helpless infant in the cradle. Not having as yet the use of reason, he knows not his dignity; others, however, already respect him, envy his happiness, and consider him the most fortunate of beings. Why? Because this infant is heir to a vast and powerful kingdom, will one day sway the sceptre and wear on his brow the crown of royalty; nature has placed him above millions of his fellow-creatures: fortune has favoured him with the choicest gifts and blessings, so that he will be enabled to indulge in every possible enjoyment of life. If, Religious soul, you were enlightened on the dignity of your state, how greatly would you prefer it to that of this infant prince! Fifty years at most, and heaven will be your inheritance; there you will receive a brilliant crown in reward of your purity, and will surpass in beauty and glory myriads of the elect; so great will be your joy, that, compared with it, all the joys and pleasures of this world are a mere nothing.

Affections

The end for which God led me into solitude is, that I may love and glorify Him on earth more ardently and with greater perfection, and be more intimately united to Him, as well as exalted to a greater degree of glory in heaven; to commence here below that ardent and reciprocal love which is to go on increasing for all eternity. May Thy infinite goodness and mercy, O my God, be eternally blessed and praised for this precious privilege, for which I can never be sufficiently

grateful. This grace is, however, to me a source of the most profound humiliation, on account of the bad use I have made of it. By this time I ought to have acquired so unalterable a meekness, that no insult could ruffle my temper or disturb the interior peace of my soul; so profound a humility as to accept contempt and reproach, not only without emotion, but with joy; so perfect an obedience as to submit, at the least intimation, to the will and judgment of others; a love so inflamed as to have attained to the most intimate union with God. Such is the perfection required of me, by the grace of vocation to the Religious state. But I have to acknowledge, in the bitterness of my soul, not having hitherto corresponded with these abundant graces.

SECOND POINT

The predilection of God for you requires that you should aspire to perfection by loving and glorifying Him with the utmost fidelity. Consider well the following truths. They will prove to you the love of God towards you, in bestowing on you the grace of vocation to a Religious life. On the part of God this grace was perfectly gratuitous. The first thoughts and emotions which enkindled in you the desire and affection for this holy state, the courage whereby you surmounted the temptations and obstacles which presented themselves, were purely an effect of the mercy of God in your regard. What advantage could He derive from this? From eternity He was infinitely happy, and without you He would have continued so for endless ages: love alone could have induced Him to do all He has done for you.

God has chosen you without any merit on your part. How many persons are there in the world more deserving of this grace, who would have corresponded more faithfully with it, and would have been much more grateful than you! Notwithstanding God has chosen you, not them. He selected you, regardless of His own honour. There are in the world innumerable souls who will be eternally lost, but who, had they been called to Religion, would infallibly have been saved. There are numbers, likewise, who would have become saints and given great glory to God had they been blessed with the grace of Religious vocation. Still God, in the order of His Providence, cast a look of mercy upon you, and, regardless of them, made choice of you, in order to unite you more intimately to Himself.

Affections

Thy goodness and mercy to me, O my God, have been boundless! Thou hast left nothing undone to lead me to my last end and to that eminent degree of glory Thou hast prepared for me in heaven. Many more deserving have been left in the world, who would have served God more faithfully, and attained the highest degree of perfection. But I was the cherished object of Thy love. God of infinite charity, how great is my debt of gratitude to Thee! Would that I could offer Thee the united love, praise, and sacrifice of the tongues and hearts of all creatures, to supply for my own inability to do so as I could desire. Alas! I have been guilty of the deepest ingratitude, inasmuch as I have been more favoured than others. Those who are in the employment of worldlings, faithfully and

cheerfully execute the least intimation of their master's will, whilst I fail in obedience even on the most trivial occasions. Many persons, for several years, bear with the utmost resignation, calumny, persecutions, humiliations, and the privations of poverty, but I am impatient of the slightest contradiction. Others, immersed in the cares and distractions of the world, perpetually and fervently raise their hearts to God, and I abuse the grace of solitude, by leading a dissipated and distracted life. Truly, beloved Jesus, it is most just Thou shouldst be irritated against me, seeing that the superabundant favours Thou dost lavish upon me fructify so little, whilst the lesser graces Thou dost bestow upon others produce so much fruit. Have I not reason to dread Thy threat being verified in me, that " many who are first shall be last, and the last shall be first ? "—*Matt.* xix. 30.

THIRD POINT

Consider the vital importance of tending to your last end, which is to love and glorify God with perfection. Recall to mind the truth you have been just meditating, namely, that the obligation God has imposed upon you is to love and serve Him more perfectly than He is loved and served by the votaries of the world. How lamentable if you do not fulfil this obligation ! You will, indeed, have reason to fear, whether God treats you according to the tenderness of His mercy or the rigour of His justice. If He deal mercifully with you, you will be awarded an inferior degree of glory, and that only after great and protracted sufferings in the flames of purgatory. I repeat, you will only obtain an inferior degree of glory. God

has prepared for you a glorious throne in heaven, but on account of your tepidity and negligence in His service you have rendered yourself unworthy of it. He will, therefore, deprive you of those extraordinary lights and graces He had destined for you, and bestow them upon some devout servant of His in the world, who will profit by them, serve Him with zeal and fervour, and finally, occupy the throne intended for you. It is certain that a tepid Religious commits innumerable venial sins, the number of which is daily increased: sins unatoned for in this life must be expiated in purgatory. Now, consider how long this purgatory, the punishment of a tepid life, may last, even were God to deal with you according to the plenitude of His mercy. Should He, however, treat you according to the rigour of His justice, your damnation is certain, and your punishment will be more terrible than that of the worldling, who was less favoured than you.

Your damnation is certain. God has declared that the earth that drinketh in the rain which cometh often upon it, and which bringeth forth only thorns and briers, is very near unto a curse.—*Heb.* vi. 7, 8. Your soul is this earth, which has been abundantly watered with the choicest graces, inspirations, facilities, and innumerable opportunities of advancing in virtue, by which you could have attained an eminent degree of sanctity. But you have brought forth no fruit—what will be the consequence? "This earth is very near unto a curse." Your reprobation will, moreover, be more terrible than that of the worldling, whose graces are less abundant. The more God has loved man in this world the greater will be His hatred in the next towards those who have despised His love.

The greater His liberality here the more will His anger be enkindled against all who shall have abused His graces. Hence the terrible threats denounced against those unfortunate cities, which, having received from Jesus Christ so many graces, did not correspond with them. "Woe to thee, Corozain; woe to thee, Bethsaida. For if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the mighty works that have been wrought in you, they would have done penance long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capharnaum, which art exalted unto Heaven, thou shalt be thrust down to hell."—*Luke* x. 13, 14, 15. It is incontestably true, that if God treat a Religious according to His justice, she will attain an exalted degree of glory in heaven, or be condemned to the lowest abyss of hell; an intermediate state is in her regard very doubtful, and we are ignorant if God will be content with a mediocrity of virtue in the Religious, or if He require of her eminent sanctity. This must ever be to us a mystery.

Affections

Again, my God, the terrible question presents itself to my mind, "Shall I be saved?" shall I make my election sure, and enter the kingdom of heaven? The absence of grievous sin may suffice to save a worldling, but it is not sufficient for me; a tepid, negligent, and unmortified life cannot save me. To secure my salvation, I must be inflamed with an ardent charity, pray more fervently, be more thoroughly mortified. Millions of souls are now in hell who were less tepid than I am, but from whom God withdrew His special assistance on account of their having abused His

graces. I am ignorant what will be my lot for eternity, but I am forced to confess that my tepidity has merited a similar punishment. I have already passed too many years in tepidity ; I have too long abused Thy graces, my God, and neglected the means of advancing in Thy love. It is now time for me to arise from this lethargy, and begin with renewed fervour the all-important work of my perfection. Let it, then, be so, beloved Jesus, immediately, from this very moment. Though late, it is still in my power to love Thee, my God, with my whole heart. Yes ! it is possible for me to love Thee from this moment with the most perfect love ; to love Thee till death, and for all eternity. Most consoling truth ! I can, then, love God perfectly, even from this very moment. I desire, O supreme and infinite Being, to give myself to Thee, with all that I am and have. I desire only Thy love, and to concentrate in my heart the charity of all the angelic choirs, in order, by one act of love, to make atonement for my past transgressions. To testify my love to Thee, I also desire, with the assistance of Thy grace, to accomplish in these days of retreat that which shall be pointed out to me as most pleasing and acceptable to Thee. Enkindle, divine Jesus, in my heart and in my whole being, the fire of Thy divine love.

THIRD MEDITATION

On Disengagement of Heart

Man strays from his last end by too great an attachment to earthly things, or by too great an aversion to all that is opposed to his natural inclinations. He

is attached to his own ease, the gratification of his senses, to riches, honours, and the esteem of men. He rejoices in the attainment of these even at the cost of offending God, and thereby strays from his last end. He has an extreme aversion to everything calculated to pain, annoy, or distress him. He shrinks from poverty, contempt, sickness, oppression, and death. These terrify and sadden him, and cause him to separate himself from God and forget his last end. If you, my soul, desire to secure your salvation, you must endeavour to reduce your heart to a state of total indifference: you must be always ready and willing to abandon all the objects dearest to you, should they become impediments to your perfection; and also, to embrace everything, however repugnant and revolting to nature, if necessary to your advancement in virtue.

FIRST POINT

The supreme dominion of God over His creatures demands of you a total disengagement of heart from all created things. You are placed in this world for no other end than to love and serve God, which implies the perfect accomplishment of His adorable will. Yes; this is your end, and you cannot accomplish it but by a total indifference.

It is not for you to determine the manner in which you are to serve God; that belongs to Him alone: you must serve Him, not as you please, but as He pleases. He is the Master, you are the servant. It is for Him to command, for you to obey. Such is also the order observed in heaven. Some angels stand perpetually before the throne of God, praising, adoring

and blessing Him; others preside over the earth as guardians of men: one is appointed to guard the monarch, another to watch over the humble peasant; each of them serves God in the manner ordained by Him. Surely, God has not less authority on earth than in heaven. Having maturely considered this point, let us proceed.

The dominion of God is boundless. He has every right to prescribe, according to His good pleasure, the manner in which He is to be served. He is God; you are His creature, and who would dare to circumscribe His power? The potter disposes of the vessel he has formed as he thinks proper; he may throw it aside, use it for the vilest purposes, destroy it; in a word, he may do with it whatever he pleases. Has not God an equal right to dispose of His creature? He may place you in whatever state He pleases, and you are bound to love and venerate the dispensations of His Providence. To serve God in whatever state He may place you constitutes your perfection, and is consequently the fulfilment of your last end; all else is loss of time. If you be appointed to an office or employment, you must fulfil the duties thereof diligently, and solely for the love of God, nor must you desire any other. This is to serve God according to His will. If your soul be overshadowed with darkness, weighed down by temptations, afflictions or desolations, you must, through love for God, resign yourself to the dispensations of His Providence: thus, you will serve Him according to His will. If the world hate, censure, and oppress you with injuries, endure all in silence for the love of God; thus, you will serve Him according to His will.

But, if you neglect to act thus, you will withdraw from God, who is your last end.

Affections

Great and omnipotent God! it is for Thee to command, for me to obey. I am bound to serve Thee as Thou pleasest. I acknowledge Thy supreme dominion over me, and humbly adore it. Woe to the disobedient servant. Not to serve God according to His will, but according to one's own fancy, would be usurpation of the rights of God, from whom we might justly expect the most rigorous punishment. Is it possible, O Supreme Being, that there should be anyone, who would presume to love and serve Thee according to his own will, and not as Thou hast ordained? Unfortunately, there are too many of such infatuated beings; and to my shame, I must confess that I have been amongst the number. Thus, I am content to love and serve Thee in health, but not in sickness; as long as I am loved and honoured, but not when humbled, contemned, or persecuted. I am willing to love and serve Thee when all goes well with me, and I am sustained by sensible devotion, but not in darkness, desolation, or temptation. Is this loving and serving God according to His will? and yet, miserable creature that I am, such is the line of conduct I have hitherto pursued.

SECOND POINT

The Providence of God demands of you disengagement of heart. It would be an arduous and difficult task to attain your last end without this total detachment of heart; but, aided by this virtue, all

will become easy to you, of which you will be convinced by serious reflection on the following truths. God is a Being infinitely wise and omniscient. He knows the means which will securely conduct you to your last end. All means are available for the attainment of salvation, provided we make a good use of them, as, for instance, health or sickness, honour or contempt, the highest or the lowest employment. But, do you know by which of these means you will most securely attain salvation? These are secrets which the all-seeing eye of God alone can penetrate, and of which both you and I, and every other being, are totally ignorant. God is infinite love. He has ordained for each individual the most appropriate means for attaining salvation, provided he cultivate disengagement of heart. God acts towards His creatures as a mother acts towards her child whom she tenderly loves. He is as incapable of permitting anything hurtful to befall a soul which resigns itself entirely to His will, as a mother would be of administering poison to her beloved infant. If God visit you with sickness, if He suffer you to be despised and calumniated, or overwhelmed with interior darkness, desolation, and temptations, you may be certain this is the most secure road towards your eternal salvation, or, in other words, your last end.

God is infinitely powerful, and He will infallibly conduct to its last end the soul which perseveres in disengagement of heart; and who would dare to oppose the designs of God? Neither angels, nor men, nor heaven, nor earth, nor the combined powers of hell, could resist an omnipotent God. You alone can counteract His loving designs, by want of

correspondence with His merciful views and by failing in the virtue of holy indifference. If, however, you persevere in the practice of this virtue, you will as surely attain your last end, as it is certain that God is a God of infinite love, infinite wisdom, and infinite power.

Affections

How consoling this truth! He who governs me is infinitely wise, and knows what is beneficial to me; He who guides me is infinitely powerful; sustained and strengthened by Him, I cannot fall. He who loves me is a God of infinite love, who continually watches over me, and regulates everything for my greater good. With this conviction, can I fail in confidence? Certainly not. I now abandon myself, O my God, unreservedly, to Thy paternal Providence, and full of confidence, I exclaim, "Thou willest me to be with Thee in heaven, there to enjoy a high degree of glory; my hopes are commensurate with Thy goodness, which is immense. Thou art my Father, and Thy love will conduct me thither. But how dare I hope for such happiness?" Such confidence belongs only to those who love and serve God according to His will, and walk in His presence with perfect disengagement of heart. Am I of that number? How very different are the dispositions of my heart! I feel so satisfied when I am praised and honoured, and so dejected when I am despised; so happy in time of consolation and sensible devotion, so disturbed when tempted and in a state of desolation. I obey cheerfully one injunction, and most reluctantly another. Is this the indifference required by those who aspire to the perfection of divine love? Have compassion on me, O my Jesus!

a heart so badly regulated is little calculated to love Thee. I may, indeed, say with truth, I have not as yet laid the foundation stone of sanctity.

THIRD POINT

The justice of God requires that you should keep your heart disengaged. If you will not submit to the dispensations of Divine Providence, and accept with humble resignation the means afforded you for atttaining perfection, the justice of God will overtake you, and what will be the consequence? An accumulation of evils which you cannot sufficiently dread, because it is certain that you will necessarily suffer much more in this world than a soul which is in all things submissive to the divine will. You would greatly deceive yourself, were you to suppose that you could escape those trials, which a loving God has ordained for you as a means of sanctification. You must inevitably undergo those pains, infirmities, humiliations, and afflictions, which God from eternity has destined for you. If you bear them with patience and conformity to the will of God, He will sustain you by His grace, and impart to you a peace and tranquillity of soul which will make the bitterness and weight of the cross sweet and easy. If, however, you are wanting in holy indifference, and yield to impatience under adversity, God will be offended; He will withdraw His assistance, and deprive you of those helps necessary to support you in your trials. It is certain you will, thereby, lose for eternity that high degree of glory destined for you, and which is not attainable but through the use of the means appointed by God. If your heart be not disengaged,

and you fail to correspond with those graces by courageously embracing the means afforded you, you will never attain to perfection. It is doubtful, even, if you will be saved. A soul not disengaged from itself must inevitably fall into many and grievous temptations. With how many feelings of anger, indignation, sadness, pusillanimity, pride, and fear of humiliations, will she not have to contend! Into what excesses will she not fall through caprice, self-will, passion, interior conflicts, and the revolt of her unsubdued nature! To overcome such difficulties, the special assistance of God would be necessary; but will He grant it to those who are unwilling to submit to His guidance, who, influenced by passion, will not make use of the means ordained by Him, who serve Him according to their own fancy, will not acknowledge Him for their Master, but obstinately resist His decrees? For such souls there can be little reason to hope, for their risk is very great.

Affections

Infinite Goodness! My Lord and my God! I can discover nothing in my soul but depravity, blindness in my understanding, and irregularity in my will. I look upon afflictions, infirmities, contempt, desolation and temptation, as the greatest of evils, while Thou considerest them as the most efficacious means for my sanctification and future glory in heaven. To such an extent have my judgment and understanding been blinded! But my misery does not stop here. My will is as vitiated as my understanding is clouded. My own ease, honour, the esteem of creatures, a false

peace and tranquillity of heart, submission when my natural inclinations are not opposed, are the sole objects of my choice : everything else terrifies me. I eagerly grasp the envenomed cup, and reject the medicine intended to effect my cure. What is the remedy ? I have this day, O my God, learned that I must love and serve Thee, as Thou willest, and not as I will ; and this I cannot do, without adopting the means Thou hast appointed for me, in order to secure my eternal salvation. From this moment I give Thee my heart, and I will make every sacrifice Thou shalt demand of me. Honour and contempt, health and sickness, consolation and desolation, all shall henceforth become to me matters of indifference. I will also submit to every injunction of obedience. Nature may repine, but with Thy assistance, grace shall in future triumph. I will employ the remainder of my life in endeavouring to love and serve Thee according to Thy will. How blessed is the soul who is thus disposed ! Charity, which is the foundation of sanctity, is now perfected in her, and will ultimately lead to the closest union with God. Would that I had attained this degree of sanctity ! but of myself I can do nothing, so great is my weakness and inconstancy. Thy omnipotence alone can strengthen and support me. Accept, O my Jesus, all the desires of my heart, purify it from all inordinate love of creatures, take from me all dread and faintheartedness with regard to those things most repugnant to my self-love. Grant me the virtue of disengagement of heart, that I may desire nothing but to please Thee, and fear nothing but to offend Thee, O Jesus, my most merciful Father. Amen.

Second Day

This day commences the first week of the Spiritual Exercises, during which, you are to consider the malice of sin viewed in the light of Faith, the number and enormity of your past sins, and you must firmly resolve to make every sacrifice rather than ever again commit one mortal sin, this being the only evil which can separate you from God.

FIRST MEDITATION

On the Sin of the Angels and of our First Parents

FIRST POINT

You may form some idea of the malice of sin from the chastisement inflicted on the rebel angels. Consider how God, having created heaven, peopled it with angels. Can we imagine a greater happiness than that enjoyed by these blessed spirits? Their beauty was so transcendent, that no mortal could behold it and live; their wisdom so stupendous, that, compared to it, that of Solomon might be termed folly; they were incapable of suffering, and their habitation was a paradise of delights. Great, however, as were these gifts of nature, they were far surpassed by those of grace. They were spirits endowed with the most perfect knowledge of God, were gifted with the most ardent charity, and enjoyed the closest and most intimate union with their Creator. They had, more-

over, a certain promise of entering, after the lapse of a brief space, into the enjoyment of His glory for eternity. The angels abused these graces, would not serve God as He willed, and thereby incurred the penalty of sin.

Let us consider attentively this terrible chastisement in its details, involving as it did the privation of all good, and the endurance of every possible evil. These ill-fated spirits, heretofore so lovely, were in one moment transformed into hideous spectres; from having been the beloved children of God, they became the objects of His hatred, and were hurled from the pinnacle of heaven to the lowest abyss of hell. All their faculties were perverted, their memories were tormented by the bitterest recollections of the past, their understandings disordered by every passion, their wills maddened by the deepest despair, they, moreover, suffered excruciating tortures from the flames of hell, in which they were plunged.

Their chastisement was without mercy. Had God but granted these miserable spirits a short reprieve, they might, perhaps, have acknowledged the enormity of their crime, have abhorred it, and afterwards have loved Him with greater ardour for eternity; but the justice of God was inexorable. At the very moment they sinned they were driven from His divine presence, without being allowed even one moment for repentance.

Their chastisement was irremediable. These hapless spirits had burned in the flames of hell for more than four thousand years, when Jesus Christ came down upon earth to destroy sin, but no benefit accrued to them from His coming. This most merciful and loving Saviour, who wept over Jerusalem, shed

not one tear for them ; He who poured out His blood for His perfidious enemies, offered not one single drop to His eternal Father for them : their sin was momentary, their chastisement eternal.

Descend in spirit into this abyss of fire ; represent to yourself the misery of these damned spirits ; observe their aspect, which is so horrible that no mortal could behold it without dying of fear. Their habitation is a dismal prison, supposed to be in the centre of the earth, encircled around and filled with fire, and such is the intensity of their torments, that no human mind can form any just idea of them. After having duly considered these truths, reason thus with yourself :—These monsters were once beauteous spirits, the cherished children of God, the work of His omnipotence, the first inhabitants and most brilliant ornaments of heaven. What evil have they committed that they should have thus been precipitated into eternal misery ? Their sin of disobedience was committed only in thought, and was but momentary, and for this one sin they have already burned in the flames of hell about six thousand years, and shall continue to burn there for eternity. Who has pronounced this terrible sentence ? God. O awful truth ! God. Sin must, indeed, be an infinite evil, or God cannot be infinitely wise, just, and merciful.

Affections

I know not, O my God, which most to contemplate with wonder, the rigour of Thy justice towards the rebel angels, or the extent of Thy mercy towards me. Those noble spirits, bright images of Thy divinity,

sinned but once, and for that one sin Thou hast condemned them to eternal torments. I, who am but dust and ashes, have committed innumerable sins, and, notwithstanding, Thou hast borne with me. I have abused Thy mercy, and again and again Thou hast pardoned me. At this very moment even, Thou lookest upon me with the tenderness of a Father, extending to me the arms of Thy mercy. Angelic spirits ! elect of God ! look down from heaven, and you will behold in me as many monuments of the mercy and forbearance of God, as there have been sins multiplied by me. Let your united praise, adoration, and gratitude, supply for my inability to render due homage to God. This mercy penetrates my heart with sorrow. I have offended a God who has loved me, more than He has loved myriads of the most exalted spirits ; a God who, at the time I most offended Him, received me into the bosom of His mercy ; a God who, notwithstanding my grievous and multiplied sins, loves me, and is desirous of loving me throughout eternity, and I have ungratefully despised His love, and offended His infinite goodness. In the bitterness of my heart, I recall my manifold transgressions. O my Jesus, I confess I am a sinner ; grant that I may sincerely repent, and be truly contrite for my many and grievous sins.

SECOND POINT

The chastisement of our first parents shows us the infinite evil of sin. Before their fall, nothing was wanting to their happiness. They dwelt in the terrestrial paradise, which was not subject to any of the vicissitudes of the seasons. They were not

obliged to labour, for the earth spontaneously produced its fruits, and these were of the most exquisite kinds. Their dominion over all living creatures was so unlimited, that the least intimation of their will was readily obeyed by all. They were not subject to fatigue, sufferings, infirmity, old age, or death. By eating of the fruit of the tree of life, they retained all the vigour and beauty of youth. Their passions being entirely subject to reason, they enjoyed an undisturbed and continual peace of soul, they were inflamed with the most ardent love of God, and had a comparatively perfect knowledge of Him, and, moreover, received a promise, that after a long and happy life, without either sickness or death, they should be translated, both body and soul, into heaven, there to reign eternally with God. The boundless liberality of God to our first parents was equalled only by their enormous ingratitude. They would not serve God as He willed, they sinned, and thereby incurred the penalty due to their sin. From the greatness of the punishment inflicted on them, we may judge of the enormity of sin. No sooner had Adam forfeited the friendship of his Creator, than he was deprived of all happiness. The earth was cursed, and produced only thorns and briers; he became liable to sickness, sufferings, and death; his soul was at enmity with God, and he was banished out of Paradise, to labour in the sweat of his brow. The chastisement of his sin was entailed on his posterity. Imagine a vast plain filled with human skulls, piled one upon another to an inconceivable height, and consider what multitudes of men have undergone the punishment of death in consequence of this one

sin of our first parents. The great majority of the human race, not excepting infants who die without baptism, have lost heaven in consequence of this sin. Let us suppose that, throughout the world, ten millions of infants die every year without baptism. In this case, more than eighteen thousand millions have died since the birth of Christ, all of whom are excluded from heaven on account of original sin. This sin has also caused the ruin of millions of souls, who are condemned to hell for having followed the bent of their unbridled passions; and, what is still more appalling, were the world to last for ever in its present state, every year, millions of souls would descend into hell in consequence of this sin. Stupendous fact! The Supreme Lord of heaven and earth, the God of Sanctity, the only-begotten Son of God, is condemned by His heavenly Father to the ignominious death of the cross in atonement for this sin. Notwithstanding such an atonement, God still continues to punish man on account of sin. We have lost paradise, are pilgrims in this place of exile, our path through life is strewed with sorrows, death fills us with terror, we are doubtful of salvation, and it now only remains for us to try to enter heaven by the means of contrition and penance.

Affections

Profound mysteries! In punishment of sin, the angels were precipitated from heaven, man was driven from paradise, millions of souls have been condemned to the torments of hell, and Jesus, the only Son of God, was condemned by His Eternal Father to die on the cross. Great, indeed, must be the malice of sin.

If God has punished it with so much rigour in the person of His only begotten and beloved Son, what chastisements may I not expect, who have not only sinned, but have persevered in sin, and even after having been pardoned, have so often been guilty of relapsing into sin! Mercifully grant me, O my God, the spirit of true and sincere repentance. With profound humility I ask pardon for the innumerable sins of my past life. I have sinned, I have offended Thy infinite goodness, and rather than commit so great an evil, I should have made every sacrifice, nay, even that of my life, if necessary. Grant me true sorrow, that I may bewail my past offences.

THIRD POINT

Let us consider the preceding truths, and weigh well the following reflections. If one grievous sin be so hateful in the sight of God, how dreadful must be the state of that soul who habitually falls into mortal sin! By the commission of one such sin, you render yourself as guilty as one of the rebel angels, as odious in the sight of God, and as deserving of punishment. But, if you have had the misfortune to offend Him a hundred times, you are a hundred times more hateful in His sight, and far more deserving of hell. How is it that you have not shared the fate of these rebellious spirits? It is owing purely to the love, goodness, and mercy of God, who has exercised the rigour of His justice in their regard, while He has treated you with the most tender lenity, If, for one sin, God has so terribly punished the fallen angels and man, ought you not to fear His justice? He, who is infinitely

merciful, has condemned myriads of angelic spirits to burn for all eternity in hell, in punishment for one sin, and that of thought only; He did not leave them one ray of hope nor one moment for repentance. If you once again grievously offend God, may He not deny you His mercy? It would be the greatest temerity to offend Him, and were He not infinitely merciful, you could not hope for pardon.

Affections

Heaven and earth, O God, are witnesses of the hatred Thou dost bear to sin! Teach me, my Jesus, to detest this greatest of all evils. I confess I have not hitherto done so. God alone ought to have been the object of my love; sin that of my hatred. It has hitherto been quite the reverse. Such impiety merited for me eternal death. It would have been better for me to have died, before I was capable of sin. Pardon me, O Jesus. I acknowledge, though too late, that I have not only sinned, but have done so repeatedly and grievously. The greater my sin, the more Thy infinite mercy seems to abound. I cannot think without horror of that fatal moment when I first lost Thy grace. O that it could be effaced from the course of my life! Had I been treated as were the rebel angels, during how many years should I now have been in hell! The thought alone makes me shudder. Thy mercy was extended to me, and time given me for repentance. Great is the debt of love, praise, adoration, and gratitude I owe Thee. Have mercy on me, O God! have mercy on me.

I now understand the infinite malice of sin. The punishment of the rebel angels, the banishment of

our first Parents from paradise, the torments and death of Jesus on the cross, all reveal it to me. Stupendous mystery! The Son of God died, and in the most excruciating torture, to atone for my sins. Could I have committed a greater crime than to have participated by my sins in the crucifixion of Jesus? O accursed sins, how is it that you appeared sweet and inviting to me? O Jesus! by the precious blood Thou didst shed for my sins, grant me those special graces which will enable me to bewail my past offences, and henceforth, to hate and avoid more than death itself every occasion of sin.

SECOND MEDITATION

On the Malice of Sin

FIRST POINT

Let us consider the infinite malice of sin in its effects. The very moment you consent to sin, the beautiful image of God is effaced from your soul, which is at once transformed into a hideous monster. It is impossible for us to conceive the surpassing beauty of a soul in the state of grace; it is one of the fairest, noblest of God's creatures; made after His image, and is the work of infinite power and wisdom. A certain Saint to whom was revealed the transcendent beauty of a soul in a state of grace, declared that she would willingly sacrifice a thousand lives, and endure all manner of torments, for the sake of preserving the beauty even of a single soul. But the soul is as much deformed by sin as it is rendered beautiful by divine grace. A soul in the state of mortal sin is so hideous,

and so perfectly resembles the demon, that no human being could behold it without dying of terror. At the very moment the soul consents to sin, she becomes odious in the sight of God, who bears an infinite hatred to sin, and it would be as impossible for God not to love Himself on account of His infinite perfections, as it is for Him not to hate sin, which is the worst of all evils. At the very moment the soul consents to sin, from being a child of God, she becomes the slave of the devil. The state of one possessed is truly pitiable, but that of a soul in mortal sin is much more lamentable, for such a soul is not only enslaved to the devil, but becomes his property. The former may be in the state of grace, and if so, may hope to be united to God in heaven; but the latter, being an enemy of God, is deprived of grace, and is, consequently, in danger of falling into hell at any moment. No sooner does the soul consent to sin, than she is reduced to a state, the vilest and most contemptible that can be imagined. Nothing can be more shameful than sin, nothing more degraded than the sinner. Let us suppose that God were to make known to the whole world every sin you had committed during life, in thought, word, or deed; what would be your shame and confusion! Would you not sink into the very earth?

Affections

O my God! how great is the number and enormity of my sins! All my powers and senses have been to me instruments of sin! My memory, will, and understanding, have been perverted. I have offended in thought, word, and deed. If one sin alone is to Thee

an object of infinite horror, how odious must my soul appear in Thy divine presence, sullied as it is with innumerable sins! Where can I hide myself to conceal the deformity of my soul? Sin seems sweet before it is committed, but it leaves nothing but bitterness behind. If I were known as God knows me, I should be an object of horror to all creatures in heaven and on earth. I am confounded, O my God, and filled with terror. To whom can I have recourse, but to Thee, God of infinite mercy and goodness? In pity grant me such sincere contrition as may thoroughly penetrate my heart, and be so efficacious as to purify my soul from every stain. I cannot obtain this without the special assistance of Thy grace. Grant it me, O Lord, and heaven and earth will have a new motive for praising and blessing Thy infinite mercy.

SECOND POINT

Consider the infinite malice of sin, compared with the nothingness of man, who dares to offend his Creator. Reflect attentively upon what you are, and what sin is. You are a weak and miserable creature, and of yourself incapable of doing the least good. A few years ago you were nothing; at this very moment your existence is so uncertain, that before long you may be carried to the silent tomb, there to become the food of worms, and return to the dust from whence you were taken. So great is the abyss of your nothingness, that it is utterly impossible for either men or angels to fathom it; God alone can do so. Nevertheless man, who is formed of dust, and a mere worm of the earth, has the audacity to rebel against

God and to oppose His divine will, and even goes so far as to contemn the Most High, saying, by deed if not by word, "Who is the Lord, that I should be obedient to His voice? I will not acknowledge Him as my master."

God has been infinitely bountiful towards you. A single moment of your life has not passed in which He has not lavished upon you some mark of His love, nor will He cease to bestow His favours upon you, as long as you are capable of receiving them. He has loved you with an eternal love, and dealt most liberally with you, without the slightest merit on your part. He had no need either of you or of your works. He also loved you with a disinterested love, for he might have conferred these graces and favours upon others, who would have served Him better than you. Yet, after having received so many benefits, you have had the ingratitude and effrontery to offend this infinitely good and merciful God. The child who, in the presence of his parent, not only does everything to displease him, but, moreover, contemns his authority, is far less culpable than you, who have acted thus towards God, who has ever been to you a most loving Father. You are indebted to your Creator for every gift and blessing you now enjoy. He it is who has bestowed them, and continues to you their possession. How base to have abused so many graces and benefits received from God, using them only to outrage and contemn His divine Majesty! How monstrous would have been the ingratitude of the lame man cured by Christ, had he been one of those who scourged Jesus; or that of the dumb man, to whom was given, by the same loving Saviour, the power of speech, had he made

use of it to blaspheme Jesus on the cross! How often have you made use of the senses of your body and the powers of your soul to offend God, who bestowed these gifts upon you! Is this the return you have made for so many favours? God rescued you from hell. It is of faith that one mortal sin merits hell; you are, therefore, indebted to the mercy of God for not having long since been its victim. How greatly must this circumstance aggravate your guilt! Were a damned soul to be to-day liberated from hell, and to have time granted for repentance, and were that soul to recommence to-morrow blaspheming God, what would you think of such base ingratitude? God has delivered you from hell, say ten or twenty times, perhaps much oftener, and what return have you heretofore made for His unbounded mercy?

Affections

Infinitely amiable and loving God! I confess in Thy divine presence that I am only deserving of hell. I, who am but dust and ashes, have had the audacity to rebel against Thee, from whom I have received the many blessings I enjoy; all that I have is the gift of God, who, every moment of my life, overwhelms me as it were with benefits of all kinds. I have sinned against God, who, by an excess of mercy, has pardoned my manifold sins. O my God, I confess that I have justly deserved, not only one, but a thousand hells, and if I have not been condemned to hell like the rebel angels, this is solely attributable to Thy mercy in my regard. The angels committed but one sin, and that in thought only, whereas I have committed innumer-

able sins; they received but one grace, I, a superabundance of graces. God condemned them for one sin, and he has spared me after so many transgressions, and still I continue to offend Him. I should never cease to weep to the last moment of my life for the many sins and offences I have committed against God. O God, to whom the secrets of all hearts are known, behold and graciously accept the desire I now feel to detest with all the powers of my soul the countless sins whereby I have hitherto offended Thee. Impart to my heart the love and contrition of all the holy penitents that have ever lived, that, like them, I may detest and lament the sins of my past life. I offer Thee, in satisfaction for these sins, the sufferings and bitter agony which Jesus endured in expiation of them, by His bloody sweat in the garden of Gethsemani.

THIRD POINT

Consider the infinite majesty of God, and the baseness of the sinner who dares to offend Him, and thus you may form some idea of the malice of sin. The greater the dignity of the person offended, the greater the guilt of the offence given. If a slave were to strike a monarch but once, it would be an infinitely greater crime than if he were to strike his fellow-slave a hundred times. Now, who is God? He is an infinitely good and perfect Being, to whom all creatures on earth and in heaven are indebted for all the gifts of grace and nature they enjoy. He is the only and inexhaustible fountain of all goodness. Conceive, then, if you can, the malice of wilfully and deliberately offending a God so infinitely good and merciful. God

is infinitely great. Raise your eyes to heaven, and imagine you see Him there, seated on His throne, surrounded by myriads of angels, who, dazzled by the splendour of His majesty, praise and bless Him with all their powers, and conscious that they cannot sufficiently extol Him, prostrate themselves before Him, confessing their total inability to love and glorify Him as He deserves. While all the blessed spirits in heaven are vying with each other, in rendering to the infinite majesty of God their united homage of love and adoration, man, a base worm of the earth, dares to contemn his Creator, nay, even to utter against Him insults and blasphemies. How great must be the malice of his sin! Words cannot describe it. Two reflections, however, may enable you to understand the enormity of this evil. Imagine that all the angels were permitted to descend from heaven and assume human nature; that all men who have died since the beginning of the world were to rise from their graves, and that angels and men during a thousand years, were to lead the most austere and penitential lives, and end their days by the most cruel martyrdom, endured for the love of God; their united sufferings would not satisfy the justice of God, even for one single sin. Moreover, were all the angels of heaven to endeavour, throughout eternity, with all the power of their understanding, to arrive at the knowledge of sin, they never could succeed in fathoming the infinite abyss of its malice.

Affections

Enlightened by Thy grace, I now acknowledge, O my God, that I have grievously offended Thee. I,

who am only a vile creature, formed of earth, and the destined food of worms, have dared to offend a God infinitely great, who is the source and fountain of every good, and the supreme Lord of heaven and earth. I have dared to sin in Thy divine presence, by an abuse of my senses, and the affections of my heart, and that, too, not in the hope of gaining an earthly kingdom or escaping death, but for the transient enjoyment of some vile or sensual gratification, or to avoid some slight humiliation, repugnant to my pride or self-love. At the very time Thou didst bestow upon me innumerable blessings of every kind, I not only did not thank Thee, but I repaid Thy love by sinning anew. What ingratitude! What madness! God alone can understand the extent of it. Such, O my God! has heretofore been my life; and in what did my repentance consist? I, from time to time, struck my breast, and made an act of contrition, but I did not amend. Surely I ought not to have been content with so vague and passing a repentance, after having so grievously offended Thee. My heart, O God, should have been continually penetrated with sorrow for my sins. O amiable Jesus, would that I had never offended Thee, and that I had had the generosity to make every sacrifice, rather than forfeit Thy grace and friendship! But the evil is already done, I have been a slave to my senses and passions. Pardon me, my God, I entreat of Thee, through Thy infinite mercy, and through the merits of the most precious blood of Thy beloved Son Jesus. I now turn to Thee with my whole heart, and resolve, in Thy divine presence, to make every sacrifice rather than ever again deliberately to offend Thee. Grant that I may

persevere in this holy resolution, and that, with the assistance of Thy divine grace, I may not again be so unfortunate as to offend Thee by the commission of any grievous sin.

THIRD MEDITATION

ON HELL

The First Pain of Hell,—the Pain of Loss

FIRST POINT

The damned soul loses God, and with Him eternal felicity. As it is beyond the narrow limits of the mind of man to comprehend the ineffable bliss of possessing God, so is it likewise impossible for him to conceive the infinite evil of being eternally separated from Him. You may, however, form some faint idea of it by seriously considering what it is to lose God. The damned soul loses the fruition of God. The moment a just soul enters heaven God so enlightens her with the knowledge of His infinite perfections, and inflames her with so ardent a desire of possessing Him, that even a momentary privation of His divine presence would, were it possible, cause her infinite suffering. As the soul thus ardently inflamed with the desire of possessing God enjoys Him with the certainty of never being deprived of His possession, but is, as it were, immersed in a torrent of endless delights, she accounts as nothing compared with this all the other joys of paradise. But, what a contrast does hell present! When a soul enters into hell, she is made sensible of the infinite perfections of God, and so strong is her desire of enjoying Him, that the privation of this Infinite Good,

even for one instant, causes her indescribable pain. She ardently desires the possession of God, but feels that she is repulsed by an irresistible force, and can never, for all eternity, hope to enjoy Him. This overwhelming thought causes the damned soul such excruciating anguish that, compared with it, all the other torments of hell are as it were nothing. In a word, as the fruition of God constitutes the principal happiness of the soul in paradise, so does the loss of God constitute the chief misery of a reprobate soul. The Providence of God no longer watches over the damned soul. As long as man lives God watches over him, enlightens his understanding, inflames his will with holy desires, stimulates him to the practice of virtue, withdraws him from vice, and supports and consoles him in his trials and sufferings. But nothing of all this can be hoped for by a soul who once enters this abode of eternal woe. She is abandoned by God, who considers her as no longer belonging to Him. Never again will He bestow upon her any of those graces which she received during life. Her imagination will be eternally tortured by the most frightful spectres, her understanding will be a prey to the most gloomy thoughts, her will be perpetually agitated by rage, fury, and despair, and her memory will be agonised by recollections of the past. Whatever way this unhappy soul shall turn, she will behold nothing but darkness, confusion, and bitterness.

The damned soul in losing God forfeits also the affection of His creatures. As long as man is upon earth, he is cherished by the Blessed Virgin, his guardian angel, and all the saints. But after he has been condemned by God, he is abandoned by them.

They will not thenceforward bestow upon his lost soul one kindly thought for all eternity. They will even rejoice at his chastisement; beholding in him a victim of the divine Justice, they will hate and execrate him. Mothers will behold from paradise unmoved their offspring damned, who will then be to them as strangers. What increases the misery of the damned in hell is, that there is not one who does not add to the torments of the rest, partly by the horror they create in each other, and partly by the mutual rage which they provoke. The soul having lost God, and with Him every good, is delivered over to the power of the demon. Abandoned by the tender Providence of God, what will become of her? The Devil, who bears an implacable hatred to man, and is endowed with knowledge proportioned to his unlimited power, will not fail to vent all his rage and fury on his unfortunate victim. Like the asp or basilisk, he can entwine himself around the body of the damned, and lacerating his members, introduce his deadly poison into the wounds he inflicts. He can torment him at pleasure, because God has withdrawn Himself from this soul, who is now under the despotic sway of the demon.

Affections

O Jesus! how terrible are Thy judgments, and how inexorable Thy justice! Infinite indeed must be the evil of sin, for bitter are its fruits. To be banished from God, abhorred by His elect, subjected to the tyranny of the demon for all eternity, such is the chastisement of sin. Have I hitherto believed this truth? I have, and this it is that adds to my guilt.

I have believed that by the commission of one mortal sin, I should expose myself to the danger of losing God, and with Him every good; nevertheless, I have sinned without fear and without remorse. I cannot determine which has been the greater sin, my wilful blindness or my malice. Sweetest Jesus, do not withdraw from me Thy tender mercy. What shall I do? What resolution shall I form? Supreme God! my last End, I am determined to make every sacrifice, however great, to secure the happiness of possessing Thee for eternity, and of beholding Jesus, my loving Redeemer, Mary, His blessed Mother, and the angels and saints of heaven. With the assistance of Thy holy grace, I do hope never again to offend Thee by any grievous sin. Angels of heaven, witnesses of the sincerity of these my resolutions, obtain for me that I may faithfully and generously fulfil them.

SECOND POINT

The damned soul, having lost the possession of God, in whom she would have found her infinite beatitude, is condemned to find in Him only a source of infinite evil. But how can such a contradiction be reconciled, as that God, who is infinitely good and constitutes the beatitude of man, should become the great and only evil of His creature? Reflect attentively on the punishments God inflicts on the damned soul, and you will clearly understand this truth. God has implanted in the soul of the damned a lively conception of His infinite beauty, with the most ardent desire of enjoying Him in heaven. In hell the soul has a far greater knowledge of God, than she ever could have had whilst on earth, and this knowledge increases her

torments, inasmuch as she thereby feels more intensely the infinite happiness she has lost in God, the sense of which loss plunges her into an abyss of the bitterest remorse. During every moment of eternity she is, as it were, attracted to God, and as violently repulsed from Him. What would be the torment of one suffering intensely from thirst, who, being chained hand and foot for a thousand years, should have perpetually before him a fountain, and yet be unable to obtain even one drop of water to allay his thirst? The damned soul has perpetually before her eyes the wrathful countenance of an angry God, who never shows Himself to her but as one greatly irritated, always ready for vengeance, and determined to chastise the guilty soul. She makes every effort to escape from this most torturing sight, to fly His presence, and hide herself from His anger. But the greater her efforts, the nearer God approaches, to make her feel more heavily the weight of His vengeance, and all the bitterness of His wrath. It would not be difficult to conceive some faint idea of the extent of this torment. As the sight alone of the most amiable countenance of God is sufficient to perfect the bliss of the saints in heaven, so is the countenance of an angry God calculated to overwhelm the damned in hell with infinite dread and suffering. God preserves the life of the damned soul, who, knowing the impossibility of ever being reconciled to her irritated God, ardently desires death, as the only means of ending her miseries. But she desires it in vain. As long as God is God, so long shall the damned soul suffer the pains of hell, and as God perpetuates the existence of the saints, that they may be eternally

regaled with new delights, so does He likewise that of the reprobate, that they may be eternally visited with new torments. The wrath of God against the damned will never be diminished. Thousands and thousands of times will the wretched soul curse her sins and her existence, utter most heartrending sighs, shed torrents of tears, sufficient to deluge the whole earth, and notwithstanding she will continue to burn in the unquenchable flames of hell for endless ages. But the wrath of God will never be appeased, nor will He, even for one moment, be moved to pity. He will hate the sinner for all eternity, and never will he be reconciled to him. Now, the damned soul, knowing this, becomes a prey to endless despair; she will foam and rage, and tear her own flesh; not satisfied with this, she will conceive an eternal hatred against God, and, transformed into a demon, will curse and blaspheme, and would, were it possible, annihilate the Most High.

Affections

O how consoling to possess a God who is infinitely loving and merciful! How terrible to have His wrath enkindled against us—how delightful to experience his liberality; how dreadful to feel His chastisements—how sweet to be immersed in the torrents of delights with which He inundates His elect; how bitter to be plunged in the abyss of unutterable woes, which He showers in torrents on the damned—what a happiness to enjoy God for eternity—what a misery to lose Him! How can I avoid this greatest of all evils? Alas! my soul, no other remedy remains for thee but a true and sincere detestation of sin. This grace, O my God, I can expect from Thy mercy alone. Grant, then, that

during the remainder of my life, I may bitterly bewail and lament my past sins and ingratitude. I detest and deplore with all my heart, all the sins whereby I have hitherto offended Thee, my most loving and merciful God. Of all evils sin is the greatest, on account of the outrage it offers to the infinite majesty of God, and the eternal miseries it entails on the soul of man. With my whole heart I desire to detest this greatest of all evils. I have sinned, the evil is already done; I have lost Thy grace, and it only now remains for me to try to regain thy friendship by hearty contrition and sincere repentance. Be converted then, my soul, and not content with passing feelings of sorrow, endeavour to excite in thyself sentiments of the liveliest compunction for all the sins of thy past life. Had I a thousand lives at my disposal, most willingly would I spend them in sufferings and humiliations, if thereby I could satisfy Thy justice for my manifold transgressions. I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I desire to renew this act of contrition during every remaining moment of my life. Supply, I beseech Thee, divine Jesus, for my want of sorrow and repentance, and offer to Thy eternal Father the agony Thou didst endure for my sins in the Garden of Olives. Grant that I may prefer all kinds of interior and exterior sufferings, calumnies, and even death itself, rather than ever again have the misfortune to become Thy enemy, by the commission of any deliberate sin. From henceforth, O my God, assisted by Thy grace, I will employ every instant of my existence in loving and uniting myself to Thee. Imprint, O my Jesus, this resolution so deeply in my heart as to make it the mainspring of all my actions.

Third Day

FIRST MEDITATION

ON HELL

The Second Pain of Hell,—the Pain of Sense

FIRST POINT

The nature of the pain of sense in hell is indescribably terrific. Imagine yourself on the summit of a high rock, enveloped in the darkness of night, and that beneath you, a deep valley exhibits to your view hell, embedded in the centre of the earth, many leagues in depth, filled with fire and brimstone, and so enclosed by impenetrable rocks, that its sulphureous flames are confined to the same space. In this prison the damned lie heaped one upon another. Consider, moreover, the nature of the fire that torments them. It is universal, extending both to soul and body. The damned soul is immovably bound for ever in hell, to that spot first assigned her by the divine Justice. She is completely immersed in fire, which burns above, below, and around her. Her every member is so penetrated with this fire, as to resemble red-hot iron, just taken out of the forge. Her habitation is fire; her meat, drink, the air she breathes, all that she beholds or touches, all is fire. This fire is not merely external; it enters into the very vitals, penetrates into the brain, heart, bowels, nerves, and even into the very marrow of the bones; and what is still more terrible, this element,

enkindled by the breath of an angry God, acts also upon the powers of the soul, burning and tormenting them. Now, let me ask you, were you bound to a furnace in such a manner as that your whole body should be exposed to the open air, with the exception of one arm, left to burn in the furnace, and that God were to preserve you in this state for a thousand years, would you not find this torture most intolerable? Imagine how much greater would be the agony, if your whole body were immersed in flames. The mind of man can form no adequate idea of the nature of this fire. Great as is the activity of terrestrial fire, it is only a shadow of that which rages in hell, and that for two reasons; first, because it is the instrument God employs in His justice to avenge the injuries committed against Him; and secondly, to make it a fitting chastisement for sin. He has imparted to this fire of hell an intensity which cannot be conceived by any human understanding. It is so great that, according to ascetic writers, if a single spark thereof were to fall on the hardest rock, it would be in a moment reduced to powder: one spark alone would be capable of liquefying brass in a moment, and of putting a frozen lake into a state of ebullition. Here pause awhile, and answer the following questions. If you had a promise of possessing a flourishing kingdom, and of enjoying every pleasure the human heart could desire, provided you would submit to be enclosed for the space of half an hour within a brazen bull, heated until it should become red-hot, would you accept such an offer on these dreadful conditions, even were you certain of not thereby losing your life? On the other hand, were you

possessed of a powerful kingdom, and had the means of enjoying every pleasure, but happened to be captured by an enemy, bound in chains, and called upon to renounce all claims to your kingdom, or to enter the brazen bull for one half hour, what would be your answer? You would assuredly say, "I prefer enduring all my life the most rigid poverty, and undergoing every possible hardship and calamity rather than submit to such a dreadful torment." Now turn your thoughts from temporal punishments to the eternal chastisements of hell. You would be disposed to make every sacrifice, cost what it might, to escape an excruciating torture, even for one half hour, and why do you not reason thus when eternity is at stake? God threatens not a transitory suffering of only half an hour's duration, but a fiery prison, out of which there is no redemption. Ought you not, then, to avoid all that is forbidden, and to do all that is commanded by Him, however painful to your nature?

Affections

My life, O my God, has not heretofore corresponded with my belief. It has been diametrically opposed to it. Alas! I have sinned, and deserved hell. And why? Not because I had to sacrifice a kingdom or avoid death, but solely for the gratification of some base passion, of which God alone was the witness, and for which I exposed myself to eternal torments. Such was my blindness—such my folly. Most merciful God, I trust Thou wilt pardon what is past, but I confess the future fills me with terror. I may again sin, I may die in my sins, and I may be lost. My evil

inclinations are anything but subdued, my passions are still unrestrained, I am yet unmortified. I have not as yet satisfied the divine justice for my sins, or advanced in the love of God. I am full of tepidity. It is, alas! but too true, I may yet be damned. My God, in this uncertainty of my salvation, what can I do but raise my heart and hands to Thee, and supplicate grace and mercy! Jesus, my God, my Redeemer, my All, remember Thy sacred wounds, Thy sufferings, and the precious blood Thou didst shed through love for me. Remember the patience with which Thou didst heretofore bear with me, and Thy merciful and loving invitations to me, to give myself entirely to Thee. Remember also the bounty with which Thou didst so mercifully pardon me, the goodness with which Thou didst not only make me a Christian, but also, bestowed upon me the grace of Religious Vocation preferably to so many others. Remember again, the long-suffering with which Thou didst bear with my impiety, and the love with which Thou didst invite me to perfection, notwithstanding the abuse of Thy innumerable graces; all of which will be unavailing if I be not sustained by Thee. Dearest Jesus! Thy paternal eyes are ever upon me; save me, who am the work of Thy hands. Of the many motives which the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem will have for blessing Thy infinite mercy, none will, perhaps, be greater than that Thou hast pardoned so base—so undeserving—so ungrateful a creature as I have been.

SECOND POINT

The pain of sense in hell is terrible, considered with regard to its duration. O awful eternity of hell! The angels have hitherto been unable to understand the full import of the word eternity. It is, therefore, impossible for you to understand it. By meditating seriously the two following truths, you may perhaps be able to form some idea of it. First, Eternity has no end! This truth made the greatest saints tremble. The dread accounting day will at last arrive, when all men shall be judged, and sinners shall then be cast into the prison of hell, the mouth of which shall be for ever closed by the omnipotent hand of God. As many millions of years shall then pass as there are leaves on the trees, drops of water in the ocean, atoms in the air, grains of sand on the shore, and after so many millions of years, eternity will but have begun. Repeat this series of years again and again, and during the whole of that incalculable period, the torments of the damned will have continued without cessation or diminution, and at the end be but at their commencement. Profound and awful mystery! O Eternity, who can comprehend thee!

Let us suppose that the first damned soul, who may now have been about six thousand years in hell, were at the end of each thousand years to shed one tear. By this time he would only have shed six tears. How many years must elapse before these tears could form a great river, fill all the valleys of the earth, inundate every city, village, and castle, overflow every mountain and deluge the world? The distance between the earth and the sun is calculated at about a hundred millions of miles, that from the earth to the planet

Neptune, three thousand millions of miles, while our distance from the region of the fixed stars, surpasses all our power of calculation. It would be impossible to imagine the number of years it would take to fill this endless void which exists between heaven and earth. Yet, O terrible truth! it is as certain as that God exists, that the time will come when these tears of this wretched soul would inundate the world, reach the sun and heavens, and fill up the space between the highest heavens and the earth. Now, supposing that God were to dry up these torrents of tears to the last drop, and this soul were to recommence its dismal task, and again to inundate the whole world with tears, and to repeat this thousands and millions of times, still after such an incalculable number of years, eternity would have only commenced for him.

The torments of the damned admit of no alleviation. Were the sufferings of a reprobate soul suspended for a short time, say even once in a thousand years, this would, after all, be but a poor consolation. This, however, cannot be. Let us imagine a compartment in hell, in which three damned souls are confined. The first is immersed in a lake of burning sulphur, the second is chained to a rock and tormented by two demons, one of whom is continually pouring down his throat boiling lead, while the other pours it all over his body; the third is tormented by two serpents, which entwine themselves around his body, one mercilessly tearing his flesh, the other gnawing his heart and vitals. Suppose that God, being moved to pity, grants them a short respite. The first, after having been tormented for a thousand years, is withdrawn from the burning lake, and receives a refreshing

draught of cold water, but after an hour, is again plunged into his fiery prison; the second, after the same length of time, is loosed from the rock and left in peace for an hour, at the end of which his torments also commence; the third, likewise, after an hour's respite, is doomed to a renewal of all his tortures. Alas! how transient these alleviations! But even this passing relief is denied to the damned soul. He is doomed to dwell for ever in the unquenchable flames of hell, never to receive the most trivial consolation, to be tortured incessantly by demons, never to experience the slightest abatement of suffering, to be perpetually consumed with a burning thirst, and unable for all eternity to obtain even one drop of water to allay it. The damned soul feels she is hated by God, who, during endless ages, will never cast one loving look upon her. She knows she is accursed in the sight both of heaven and of hell, and will never receive from any being one act of kindness. This constitutes the essential misery of hell. All is there without help, without remedy, without any mitigation, interminable, endless, eternal!

Affections

I am now, O my God, able to form some faint idea of what hell is. It must, indeed, be a place of overwhelming suffering and unutterable despair, into which I should long since have been cast, had it not been for thy infinite goodness and mercy. I shall during the remainder of my life proclaim, and I hope throughout eternity to sing, the mercies of my Jesus, whose Sacred Heart has loved me, whose mercy has been extended to me, whose precious blood has

reconciled me to His heavenly Father, and saved me from eternal perdition. Infinite goodness and charity of God, to have borne so long with me! And what return have I made for so much love? After so many benefits received, ought I not to love Him with a seraphic love, direct to him all my actions, seek in everything His divine will alone, and accept joyfully all contradictions to prove my love for Him? Can I do less after having received from Him so signal a benefit as that of having been rescued from hell, without being guilty of such ingratitude as would indeed merit a new hell? Alas! I have only repaid Thy mercies by fresh crimes. I confess, most merciful God, that I have sinned, and I am sorry from the bottom of my heart for having done so. Would that my heart could burst with sorrow for my sins. Have mercy on me, O Jesus, have mercy on me! With the assistance of Thy grace, I am now firmly resolved rather to die than ever again deliberately to offend Thee.

SECOND MEDITATION

On the Fruit to be derived from the preceding Meditations

We have now considered the eternal miseries to which a soul is doomed who loses God, her last end; but what will this knowledge avail, if we do not adopt the necessary means to avoid sin and to secure our salvation? The truths I am about to propose, you would do well to consider attentively, kneeling before your crucifix.

The first fruit to be drawn from the foregoing

meditations is a hearty sorrow for past sins, and thorough amendment of life. Now may I ask, what is the present state of your conscience? What would be your feelings were an angel to descend from heaven and announce to you, that in an hour hence you must die? Would you die with confidence in your present state? Have you made your confessions in such a manner, as to entertain a well-grounded hope that your sins are forgiven? In short, would you be satisfied to die this very hour? Answer, but do so before that crucifix, which bears the image of Him who knows your heart. Remember that the first step to sanctity or intimate union with God, is purity of heart, which so fills the soul with interior peace, that she is prepared not only to die, but even to die suddenly at any moment, and appear before the judgment-seat of God. To attain this happy state, you must make the two following resolutions, during the time of the spiritual exercises.

First, after having carefully examined your conscience, and with great fervour excited yourself to contrition, make an exact and generous confession (if you have not already done so), which will give to you the greatest confidence when you are summoned before the tribunal of God, having the consciousness that you have done all that depended upon you to obtain the full remission of your sins. What consolation, interior peace, and certain hope of eternal life, may be derived from such a confession! After having thus recovered the grace of God, and secured, as far as depended on you, a well-grounded hope of future glory, you must, in the second place, resolve to make every succeeding confession with as

much exactitude, contrition, sincerity, and generosity, as if you were certain it would be the last confession of your life.

The second fruit to be derived from the preceding meditations is a sincere determination to make satisfaction in as much as you possibly can, to the justice of God for your past sins. Visit once more in spirit the prison of hell. Imagine that at this moment that gloomy abode is illumined by a ray of divine mercy, and that a heavenly voice thus addresses Cain: "You have now been burning in these flames for six thousand years. I will show mercy to you provided you return to the earth, and there endure in silence every description of suffering, infirmities, contempt, insults, reproaches, crosses, trials, and contradictions for the love of me. On this condition, I will pardon your sins and save you." With what delight would not the heart of that wretched being beat at such an announcement! "O infinite goodness and mercy!" would he exclaim, "I am willing to suffer with joy for a thousand years all that man can endure provided I shall at length obtain mercy, and am permitted to contemplate Thee in Thy glory!" Tell me now, have you not deserved hell as much as Cain? If so, the mercy of God in your regard has been as great in having granted you time for repentance, as it would have been had He actually taken you out of hell. How is it then, that you do not endeavour, by a true repentance, and the patient endurance of trials and adversities, to atone to the offended majesty of God, for all the injuries you have done to Him by the commission of sin? Resolve, therefore, first, to adopt with great fidelity and fervour the means ordained by

Almighty God for making satisfaction to His divine justice for sin: these are, the devout frequentation of the holy sacraments, assisting at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, endeavouring to gain indulgences, frequent and fervent acts of contrition, and works of penance and mortification. Secondly, to endure in silence, for the love of God, all the trials and annoyances incident to your state, and that occur in the order of divine Providence. In every trial which may befall you let the continual aspiration of your heart be, "O most merciful God, by my sins I have merited the pains of hell: how light and momentary then, in comparison, are all the crosses and afflictions of this life!"

The third fruit to be derived from these meditations is, a firm purpose to avoid all venial sins, especially those which lead to mortal sin. It is not sufficient to entertain a determined resolution to die rather than consent to mortal sin; you must form a similar resolve with regard to venial sin, otherwise you will never be secure. Nothing can impart a more certain hope of eternal salvation, than a continual watchfulness in avoiding even the slightest deliberate venial sin, and a great and continual fervour in all the exercises of a spiritual life; in the duty of prayer; in continual recollection of the presence of God; in the practice of mortification and self-denial; in the virtues of humility and endurance of contempt; in obedience and charity towards God and your neighbour. If you desire to acquire this fervour and to persevere in it, you must firmly resolve to avoid for ever the following venial sins. You must not entertain in your heart any suspicion or rash judgment

prejudicial to your neighbour, speak of his defects, or in any other way offend against charity. You must not omit your spiritual exercises through indolence or perform them negligently. You must not be inordinately attached to any creature or thing, or too much esteem yourself or what belongs to you. You must not receive the holy sacraments negligently, with distractions or irreverence, and without due preparation. You must not yield to impatience in adversity, repine under crosses, or oppose the ways and dispositions of divine Providence in your regard. You must not endanger, even remotely, the integrity of the holy virtue of purity. You must not deliberately conceal your bad inclinations, weaknesses, or even your mortifications, from those who have the charge of your soul, as by doing so, you would undertake to trace out for yourself a path to perfection, and thus, being guided by your own fancy, withdraw from the guidance of obedience. If you be not resolved to avoid these venial sins, you will not derive any fruit from the spiritual exercises, nor advance in perfection, nor attain to union with God, nor enjoy interior peace, nor be in such dispositions as will enable you to meet death without fear. But if you be resolved to avoid them, kneel down before your crucifix, and offer to God your resolutions by the following prayer :—

My God, my Jesus ! crucified for love of me ! Enlightened by Thy grace, I now understand the happiness of possessing and the misery of losing Thee for eternity. How happy shall I be if I succeed in gaining Thee ! how miserable if I lose Thee ! I well know that I cannot hope for the former, and must always fear the latter, unless I devote myself entirely

to Thy love and service. This, beloved Jesus, I am resolved to do with all the sincerity of my heart. I love Thee, my Jesus, at least I desire to love Thee, with the most ardent charity. Thou art infinitely good, and therefore more deserving of my love than all creatures in heaven and on earth. I love Thee, most merciful Jesus, with all the ardour of my soul, and I desire to love Thee with a seraphic love. I long to possess Thee, O my Jesus. Thou art my last end, my only happiness, the sole object of my desires. I hope to enjoy Thee in heaven, whatever it may cost nature and self-love. In Thy divine presence, and aided by Thy grace, I renew my resolutions, and hope never again to violate them. Strengthen my weakness and grant me such efficacious grace as will enable me to keep them to the end of my life. This grace I ask through the merits of Thy most precious blood.

THIRD MEDITATION

On the Kingdom of Jesus Christ

With this meditation commences the second week of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. It contains four meditations, the object of which is the following or imitation of Jesus Christ. In the meditations of the first week, you have bewailed the sins of your past life, resolved to love God with your whole heart, and to tend with all your strength to your last end. As you are ignorant of the road you are to take in order to reach this end, the Eternal Father has sent His only Son to be your guide, to point out the way,

and be your model. From the meditations of this week you are to learn how to follow Jesus Christ.

FIRST POINT

There are two reasons which clearly point out how just and necessary it is for us to follow Jesus Christ. In the first place let us consider attentively the end for which Jesus Christ came into the world. Alas! what misery would have been ours had not the Redeemer become incarnate! Our first parents sinned, and by their sin deprived themselves and their posterity of all right to glory. Of so many thousands of millions of men who have been born since the creation of the world, or who may in aftertimes be born, not one could enter heaven or enjoy God for eternity. Surely, the human race could not be reduced to a more deplorable condition. Again, since none of the children of Adam could enter heaven or enjoy God, so neither could they praise Him for all eternity. Oh, what a diminution of the extrinsic glory of God! Now, however, that Jesus Christ is come into the world, we can all enter heaven; its gates are no longer closed against us, provided we choose to follow him. In heaven there are countless choirs of saints, who will bless and praise the holy name of God for all eternity. Can there be a more noble and sublime end than the glory of God and the eternal beatitude of man!

In the second place, let us consider the conditions on which Jesus Christ invites us to follow Him. The kings of the earth sit upon their thrones, and when obliged to undertake some great work or dangerous expedition, they do not expose their own lives, but

send their vassals in their place. Jesus Christ acts quite otherwise. "I do not require," does He say, "that My followers should be more meanly clad and lodged than I, nor that they should eat or drink more scantily than I do. I do not wish them to be first in the battle-field, for I will go before them; I only wish that they should follow Me." What wonderful conditions on the part of Jesus Christ! He is innocence itself, the supreme Lord of all things, whose kingdom is the heavens. I am a miserable sinner, formed of earth and deserving of hell, and yet He does not require of me to labour or suffer more than He has done, but only to follow Him.

Affections

If, beloved Jesus, Thou hadst no other end in inviting me to follow Thee, than the glory of Thy Eternal Father, I would be obliged to obey Thee. He is my supreme Good, and sovereign Lord and Master, on whom I entirely depend, and for the advancement of whose glory I am bound, if necessary, to shed the last drop of my blood. Thou hadst in view not only the honour and glory of Thy Eternal Father, but also the salvation and eternal happiness of my soul. Thou dost invite me to follow Thee that I may partake of Thy glory, Thy happiness, Thy delights, Thy beatitude! What praise, blessings, and thanksgivings do I not owe Thee! As the glory of Thy most holy name and the salvation of my soul depend on my following Thee, I am resolved, divine Redeemer, to do so with all the fervour and perfection of which I am capable. Nature will, no doubt, rebel, and great will be the combat: but can I, a miserable

creature, drawn out of nothing, who have committed innumerable sins, and thereby merited hell, refuse to do or suffer what Thou, who art innocence and sanctity itself, the supreme Lord of heaven and earth, my God, my Creator, and my Redeemer, hast done and suffered for love of me? No, dearest Jesus, this shall not be. Thy life shall be my model. Henceforth, with Thy divine assistance, I will walk in Thy footsteps and in the path trodden by Thee.

SECOND POINT

It is most sweet and easy to follow Jesus, as may be seen from the two following reflections. Let us consider them attentively. The first is the interior peace, joy, and happiness with which Jesus Christ, even in this world, rewards those who closely follow Him. His sufferings whilst on earth were not unmixed with consolations. At His birth, being refused a lodging by man, He was obliged to seek shelter in an obscure stable, but angels descended from heaven to announce His glory to the earth; He was tempted in the desert by the demon, but angels there ministered unto Him; He was blasphemed and outraged during the time of His preaching, but He was transfigured and refulgent with glory on Mount Thabor. If, then, the cross of Jesus Christ during His life was not without solace, neither will ours be, for He makes this express condition: "I do not wish that they should suffer more than I." Yes! The greater the perfection with which you follow Jesus Christ, the more abundantly will God impart to you His heavenly consolations. Listen to His own words, which cannot pass away. "My yoke is sweet and My

burden light." It is always sweet to be near Jesus, even in the midst of afflictions, and always painful to be separated from Him, though surrounded by pleasures. It is certain that if only one ray of consolation fell from heaven, that ray would most assuredly enter the heart of the faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

The second motive for consolation is, the infinite glory and beatitude with which God rewards in the next world those who have faithfully followed Him during life. After the lapse of a few years, you will see and enjoy God in heaven. What a consoling thought, and how much ought it to alleviate your sufferings! Imagine you behold our Blessed Redeemer bearing a heavy cross upon His sacred shoulders, that at the same time the heavens open, and disclose to your view a throne surpassing in beauty and splendour that of many millions of the elect, and that Jesus Christ casts upon you a look of ineffable love and tenderness, and thus addresses you: "Behold the throne which is destined for you, and which shall be yours for all eternity, if you will only follow Me for a few short years." Would you not then joyfully resolve to follow Jesus and would not this promise console and support you in all your labours and tribulations? Now, enlightened by Faith, supported by the hidden virtue of the cross, why not make some efforts to secure your inheritance, that is, to be a fellow-citizen of the saints, a companion of the angels, to sit on the same throne with Christ, and to see God Himself for eternity face to face?

Affections

I believe, and must confess, beloved Jesus, that "Thy yoke is sweet and Thy burden light," because Thou, who art infinite Truth, hast said it. My self-love and cowardice alone prevent me following Thee. Were I generous enough to deny myself, I should very soon experience the truth of Thy promises. To the worldling, what could seem more dismal and gloomy than the life of those tender virgins, who, in the primitive ages of Christianity, retired to the deserts, or into the hollows of the rocks and mountains? But it was into their hearts that God poured the torrent of His delights. Equally unendurable seemed the lives of other devout women, who in latter times passed their lives amidst trials, crosses, insults, reproaches, oppressions, persecutions, and afflictions of every kind; but they were rewarded by being raised to the most intimate union with Jesus Christ, who enriched them with his choicest graces. Shall I alone, by following Jesus, be abandoned by Him in my sorrows, left without any support, or even one ray of consolation? No, dear Jesus, Thou wilt not abandon me; my confidence in Thy mercy is unbounded, and with Thy grace I am firmly resolved to follow Thee.

THIRD POINT

In order to be perfect, you must follow Jesus Christ. Being persuaded of this truth, you will see how necessary it is to follow Him in all things as closely as possible. "If you will be perfect," said our divine Redeemer to the young man in the Gospel, "come and follow Me." Do you acknowledge this truth! It is

undeniable: but you are intimidated at the sight of the rough and thorny road through which Jesus Christ has passed, and in which you must necessarily walk, if you be willing to follow Him. Jesus Christ is infinite Wisdom and Truth. He descended from heaven for the sole purpose of showing you the way which leads to sanctity. Were there an easier and safer path than that which He has pointed out to us we should have reason to question His infinite wisdom or veracity, and accuse Him of having left us in ignorance of that easier way which would lead to eternal life.

Jesus Christ is infinitely loving and infinitely good. He loves us, and would not, therefore, ordain anything unnecessarily which would pain or afflict us. If, in the midst of the pleasures, the honours, the enjoyments of earth, we could with ease and safety work out our salvation, procure glory and honour to Christ, and thus attain the end of our creation, our All-wise and All-merciful Father would, no doubt, keep His dear children strangers to pain and privations, exempt from the ills of life, and would lead them through pleasant ways, bordered with roses. But this loving God knows well that the broad road of pleasure leads to eternal perdition, and hence He invites us to follow Him in the rough and thorny path which leads to life everlasting. Therefore does He say to us, "Deny yourself, crucify your flesh." Violence to nature and to self secures heaven; the sufferings of this life are not worthy of the eternal weight of glory prepared for us in the other. Pause for a moment and reason thus with yourself. There are two terms, to one of which all men must arrive;

the one is infinite misery, which is hell; the other, infinite happiness, which is heaven. Two roads only lead thither; the broad road, in which the greater part of mankind walk, leads to hell; while the rugged and narrow path, in which Jesus Christ walks, at the head of a small band of the elect, leads to heaven. Most important truth, uttered by the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself, who declares, "No man cometh to the Father but by Me," which signifies that no one can enter the kingdom of heaven if he do not walk in the narrow path trodden by Jesus Christ. Which of these two roads will you choose?

Affections

I have just reason to fear, divine Redeemer, when I reflect on my past life! Hitherto I have adored Thee as my God and my Redeemer, but I have not followed Thee as my Guide and my Leader. Those virtues, the practice of which Thou dost call a sweet yoke and light burden, I have considered as irksome, and as too oppressive. I have not reflected that by entertaining this thought, I have blasphemed Thy infinite wisdom and goodness. O my God, my Redeemer, my Master, my Guide! I confess I have sinned without excuse, and I am heartily sorry for having done so. How happy should I now be, had I been always guided by Thy spirit and followed Thy example!

Thou art the way, the Truth, and the Life. From this moment, beloved Jesus, I resolve to abandon my evil ways, and to consecrate myself unreservedly to Thy love and service. Be my Guide, lead me, if such be Thy holy will, through sorrows and humiliations,

expose me to persecutions and calumnies; I desire only to imitate Thee, and to walk in the path Thou hast traced out for me; where Thou art, I desire to be. Grant me, beloved Redeemer, the grace faithfully and generously to correspond with Thy loving designs over me; I ask for nothing more.

Fourth Day

FIRST MEDITATION

On the admirable Humility displayed by Jesus Christ in His Incarnation and Birth

FIRST POINT

In His incarnation and birth, Jesus Christ humbled Himself most profoundly. How great and stupendous are the prodigies of humility we have to consider in this mystery! Jesus Christ assumed human nature. Now, however enlightened a soul may be, it can never understand the self-abasement of the Word Incarnate. Imagine a great and powerful monarch, possessed of immense riches, endowed with wisdom and every gift and talent suited to his high station. The nobility, army and people love him as a father; he is surrounded by every enjoyment that can contribute to his happiness. This great monarch descends from his throne, throws aside his royal purple, and secretly quits his dominions. Disguised in tattered garments, he goes into a foreign country, and there, devoting himself to the menial duties of a servant, leads a hidden life. What would be the abasement of this monarch compared with that of Jesus Christ in His incarnation? Reanimate your faith, and consider who this loveliest of infants is, whom you behold in the stable of Bethlehem. He is the only Son of the eternal Father, the Lord of armies, the most high God, who, regardless of His own greatness and infinite

beatitude, descended from heaven, where He received the homage and adoration of myriads of angelic spirits. He became man, and in the form of man dwelt on earth in obscurity until death. Can the mind of man conceive a more complete annihilation!

Jesus, moreover, assumed the form of man in its most helpless state, that of infancy. Can there be any state which has greater claims upon our sympathies? An infant cannot use his limbs, but must be carried by another. He cannot feed himself, but is dependent upon others for sustenance. If he suffer pain, he cannot tell it otherwise than by his sobs and tears, to say nothing of the many other miseries to which he is subject. Infants, not having the use of reason, are unconscious of their sufferings; but Jesus Christ, being God as well as man, was fully sensible of the state of misery and abasement to which He reduced Himself. He might have entered the world in all the vigour of manhood, but it pleased Him to assume the helpless form of an infant! Jesus Christ, in becoming man, concealed both His divine attributes and His human perfections. Contemplate this divine Infant lying in the manger. Behold the omnipotent God who created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. He cannot walk or stand; the God of infinite strength, who with one finger balances the universe, is so weak that He must be carried in the arms of His Virgin Mother; the Wisdom of the Father is become incapable of uttering a single word; the God of infinite riches, from whom the most powerful monarchs hold all they possess, is without any other lodging than a mean stable. What humiliation! What self-sacrifice on the part of our Redeemer!

Affections

Most humble Jesus! how vastly different are my desires from Thine. Thy love for the virtue of humility caused Thee to descend from heaven to earth—through pride I would ascend from earth to heaven; Thou didst humble Thyself to the helpless state of infancy—I, through pride, ambition the most honourable offices; Thou didst conceal Thy infinite perfections to avoid the praise and esteem of men—I, on the contrary, display every imaginary good quality in order to gain applause; Thy thoughts are directed to humiliation and self-abasement—mine tend to self-esteem and aggrandizement. Alas! my Jesus, I must confess that I am not actuated by Thy spirit, and that my thoughts are as far from Thine, as heaven is from the earth.

I am now convinced that I have not, hitherto, walked in the path pointed out by Thee. I am heartily sorry and sincerely repent of all the ambitious thoughts and desires to which I have consented, the vain-glorious words I have uttered, the good works I have performed through vanity and ostentation. To Thee alone is due all honour and glory, because Thou art the origin and source of every good. Henceforth, I will bear in mind Thy humiliations, that I may love them, and I will accept, with cheerful resignation, those which Thy Providence shall permit to befall me.

SECOND POINT

Jesus Christ, in His incarnation and birth, and throughout the whole course of His life, willingly accepted contempt and humiliation from man. Consider

how He was received by the world at His birth. What greater affront could be offered to a man than to be rejected by his own people, and not to find any one in his own country who would afford him a shelter, even for one night? Yet, thus was Jesus Christ treated in Bethlehem. Everyone else found a lodging; Jesus, alone, with His Virgin Mother, was excluded by all, and compelled to take shelter with beasts in a stable, where the Immaculate Virgin Mother gave birth to the Saviour of the world. And how did Jesus bear this treatment? He rejoiced at it, because He willed to be so treated, for had He not willed it, He could have sent legions of angels to announce His coming; He could have made the earth tremble at His entrance into it, and inspired the people to venerate and adore His supreme Majesty. But He did nothing of all this, that He might be exposed to sufferings and humiliations for the love of us. How was Jesus Christ treated by the world after His birth? Even worse than at His nativity. A new star appeared in the heavens; the kings of the East journeyed to Jerusalem, and proclaimed the birth of the Saviour. Surely, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem ought to have hastened to adore their Infant God. Ungrateful people! Of so many hundreds of thousands, not one went to see and adore the new-born King. They even met in council, to devise the most effectual means of depriving Him of life. His death was decreed, the day for His massacre was fixed, and to save His life, Jesus was forced to flee into Egypt.

In what esteem was Jesus Christ held by the world when he reached a more advanced age? His life at

Nazareth was not less humiliating than His birth at Bethlehem. He lived with His blessed parents at Nazareth, and both at home and abroad He laboured with His reputed Father, to gain His daily bread by the sweat of His brow. Who could ever have imagined, that under the appearance of an humble artisan, a God made man would be concealed? The Eternal Father did not reveal this mystery to the world; Mary and Joseph also kept it secret, and Jesus Himself did not manifest any of the treasures either of His divine or of His human nature. Hence, nothing more was known of Him than that he was a virtuous and industrious youth, the son of a carpenter, that His name was Jesus, and that He diligently assisted His father in the labour of his calling. This is all the praise and commendation which this God-Man received from the world during the space of thirty long years. Of Him who created heaven and earth, it was merely said, that he was the son of a carpenter.

Affections

How contemptible must riches and honours appear in the sight of God! In his hands are the hearts of all creatures, and he could in one moment have wrought such stupendous miracles, as to procure for Himself the adoration and homage of every creature. But, such was His love for poverty and contempt, that he concealed His infinite perfections under the appearance of an humble artisan, the more securely to shun all honour and esteem. It is but too true that an incarnate God has shunned honour, and that I avoid contempt; that He loved to remain hidden, and that I seek to be known; that He welcomed

insults, and that I rejoice in honour. Wretch that I am, how deplorable is my state! The propensity of Thy divine mind, O my Saviour, leads to sanctity, that of mine to perdition; Thy humility opens heaven, my pride closes its gates against me. Although I, a miserable sinner, am much more esteemed than Jesus Christ was whilst on earth, still such is the extent of my pride, that I am not yet satisfied. As a Religious, I am treated with a respect and reverence that was never shown to Jesus, who, apparently, was a poor and humble artizan. Alas! I desire to be more esteemed than my Redeemer! This I acknowledge, O my Jesus! but I know not how to correct it, so deeply rooted in me are the love of honour, and the detestation of contempt. Thy honour, the friendship of God, my advancement in virtue and sanctity, all are endangered and retarded thereby. Thou alone, O Jesus, canst apply a remedy to so great an evil.

THIRD POINT

To meditate seriously on the humility of Jesus Christ is of the utmost importance to our advancement in virtue. Beg the light of the Holy Ghost, that you may fully comprehend the extent of His humiliations.

Nothing can render a soul more pleasing to God, than a love of contempt and self-abasement. Let us suppose that you were in existence before the birth of Christ, and that the Eternal Father, in order to convince you of your pride, inquired of you in what manner He should introduce His Son into the World. What would have been your answer? You would undoubtedly have said, He should be born of an illustrious queen, the spouse of a great monarch, in

a splendid palace, suitable to His rank. Myriads of angels should precede Him to announce His coming and assisting at His birth, be the first to offer their praise and adoration to the incarnate God. He should, moreover, ascend a time-honoured throne, display His infinite wisdom and majesty, and govern the world with supreme authority. Such would have been your advice; how different the decrees of the Most High! "My beloved Son," He said, "shall be born of a poor and humble Virgin; His dwelling shall be a stable; His cradle a little straw; He shall not rule, but obey; lead a life of obscurity in daily toil, and die amidst insults and contempt." Alas! how great our blindness! We covet honour, praise, and glory, and God chooses contempt and humiliation. Consider the life of Jesus. It was a series of humiliations, contempt and sufferings. This life of sacrifice was most pleasing to His Eternal Father, and effected the salvation of mankind. God detests a soul enslaved to vain-glory. The less a soul resembles Jesus Christ, the more odious she is in the sight of the Eternal Father. What resemblance can one attached to praise, honours, and self-esteem bear to Jesus Christ, who humbled and immolated Himself, desired only insults, rejoiced in ignomies, and began and ended His life in poverty, contempt, and humiliations? Here examine, if you can trace any resemblance between your conduct and that of Jesus.

Affections

My tears, O Jesus, must now plead for me. My heart does not in the least resemble Thine! Thy Sacred Heart abhors praise, honour, and vain-glory, and entertains an ardent desire for insults and

contempt, but mine does the very reverse. Alas! that which ought to be the remedy for my wounds, only serves to lacerate and inflame them. The most efficacious means to subdue my pride would be affronts, contempt, and derision; but unfortunately, I avoid every opportunity of practically advancing in the virtue of humility. By Thy humility, O Jesus, aid me. To Thy mercy I am indebted for the self-knowledge I now have, and the abhorrence I feel for all the sins of pride and vain-glory whereby I have offended Thee, and for which I am heartily sorry. Thou art the source and origin of all good; to Thee alone are due all praise, honour, and glory; while I merit only to be despised and contemned by all. I entreat Thee, my dear Lord, with all the ardour and affection of my soul, to grant me the grace of sincere and profound humility, this great virtue which is the characteristic of Thy Spirit, the badge of Thy elect, which leads to the most intimate union with Thee, and opens the gates of heaven. The proud soul cannot be united to Thee; for she is hateful in Thy sight. I ought to deem no sacrifice too great to acquire the virtue of humility. Henceforth, sweet Jesus, I will never consent to any vain thought, I will avoid all self-praise, and never do anything through vain-glory; I will accept willingly and in silence contempt and insults, from whatever quarter they may come. O my Jesus! how easy it is to make, but how difficult to be faithful to such resolutions! Thou alone canst assist me, who art my only hope, help, and strength. I will cling to Thee, Beloved of my soul, so humbled, so despised, so debased for love of me.

SECOND MEDITATION

On the hidden Life of Jesus Christ, and on His admirable Obedience

FIRST POINT

Jesus Christ, through love for His Eternal Father, and to give you an example of obedience, was pleased in all things and at all times to be subject to others. By the sacrifice of your own will and liberty as a Religious you have subjected yourself till death to the will and judgment of another, which engagement is accompanied by many and great difficulties. But will you not cheerfully submit to these, since all the trials you may have to endure in the practice of obedience are ordained by divine Providence for your greater good, and moreover, Jesus Christ submitted to many more for love of you? Consider now in detail the difficulties arising from the practice of obedience. First, with regard to the office or employment it may assign you or impose upon you. You may be tempted to imagine that such an office or employment is too lowly or menial, or that others, placed in the more important offices, are less talented and less competent than you. But, if you will only cast one glance at Jesus, you will no longer consider any office or employment too lowly. Who is He? He is the King of kings, the God of armies, the supreme Monarch of the universe, endowed with so much wisdom, that He could, without difficulty, enlighten all men with the knowledge of His divinity; with so much power as to be able to fill the whole world with miracles; with so much eloquence as to move all

hearts to love Him ; with so much virtue and influence as without difficulty to convert the whole world. What is the employment of this Supreme Being ? O stupendous miracle ! For twenty years, He is occupied in a carpenter's shop, assisting and obeying in everything His reputed father. Imagine that you are in this humble abode, and contemplate the divine Being who is there at work, and surely, you will be ashamed to murmur or complain even though the lowliest office were allotted to you.

The second difficulty annexed to obedience is that which may arise from our superiors. During a series of years spent in Religious life, you may have sometimes to deal with superiors whose government is uncongenial to you. Some may want the discernment necessary to understand the characters of their subjects, and to guide them accordingly ; others may be wanting in charity to enable them to support and compassionate their weaknesses ; one may be devoid of that kindness of manner which is calculated to win affection and to render the yoke of obedience light, while another may be wanting in a well-regulated condescension to all. Those however who desire to practise the virtue of perfect obedience, must not be influenced by any of these circumstances. Jesus Christ is our Model. Behold Him standing before the tribunal of Pilate, whilst the latter is in the act of pronouncing against him the sentence of death. Jesus could without difficulty have liberated Himself—proved His innocence before the whole world—hurled Pilate from his tribunal into hell, and rendering Himself invisible, as He did on other occasions, have escaped out of the hands of His enemies. Jesus however did not avail

Himself of any of these means of escape, but accepted the sentence of death pronounced by Pilate, as coming from His Eternal Father. He obeyed promptly; He obeyed unto death, even unto the death of the cross. Who then, that considers the heroic submission of Jesus to this iniquitous judge, can complain of the difficulty of obeying a superior?

The third difficulty annexed to obedience arises from our own inclinations, and the nature of obedience itself. In the Religious state we are often required to do many things opposed to our judgment, and which seem to us neither useful, necessary, nor even advisable. We may be called upon to do things contrary to our natural inclinations, or at variance with our own will, and which in themselves are difficult, especially if of long continuance. But had not Jesus much greater difficulties to contend with? Was it easy for Him, think you, to spend thirty years in subjection to an humble carpenter, to pass three years going from place to place, exposed to continual insults, reproaches, calumnies, and persecutions; to be often sought for, in order to be put to death; finally, to receive the sentence of death, and to die ignominiously on a cross? In all these trials, Jesus Christ obeyed, not only without a murmur, but promptly, cheerfully, and with the most perfect meekness. Alas! what is your obedience compared with that of Jesus Christ?

Affections

O my Jesus! I cannot trace the slightest resemblance between myself and Thee, who art the Model of all sanctity! I ought to divest myself entirely of

my own will—behold God in the person of my superiors —be submissive in everything to their commands, and so far from manifesting any repugnance to their orders, I ought to obey promptly and cheerfully, Thus am I bound to obey ; such is the obedience required of me by the example of Jesus Christ, and the solemn vow I made to God. How have I hitherto obeyed ? I have committed innumerable sins of pride, contempt, obstinacy, murmuring, disrespect to those placed by Divine Providence over me, negligence in the fulfilment of their injunctions, and by many other sins have deviated from obedience.

I now understand the enormity of my offences, and how grievous they must appear in Thy sight. Heretofore I made little or no account of them. By my disobedience, I have not offended man, but Thee, the Most High God, to whom I solemnly promised obedience in the person of my superiors. As often as I preferred my own will to theirs, so often have I despised Thy infinite wisdom ; as often as I murmured, either in thought or word, at the orders given me, so often have I contemned the dispositions of Thy Providence. Thou hast said, " He who hears you, hears Me, and he who despises you, despises Me," and from these words I may infer what must be the heinousness of my offences. Great, indeed, must have been my blindness, not to have been aware up to the present time of the gravity of these transgressions. But now, O my Jesus, that Thou hast enlightened me to know their deformity, I am heartily sorry for them.

SECOND POINT

Consider the incalculable advantages the soul derives from the practice of prompt and perfect obedience. You have meditated on the obedience practised by Jesus Christ ; reflect now on the advantages arising from the acts of this virtue.

First advantage.—The obedient soul is at all times and on every occasion certain of doing the will of God. Let us suppose for a moment, that your guardian angel were, by the special permission of God, to assume a *visible* form, and were to intimate to you on every occasion what God requires of you, and what there is in you displeasing to God. Could a greater privilege be conferred upon you ? Now if your faith be lively, you cannot but know, that guided by obedience, you are as certain of doing the will of God, as if your holy angel were thus to assure you of it ; as certain as was Jesus Christ, during His mortal life, and as the apostles were, who received their directions from the lips of our Divine Lord Himself.

Second advantage.—Every act performed by an obedient soul is of immense value in the sight of God. Nothing in this world can equal the excellence of obedience. The most trifling act performed through obedience, becomes most meritorious before God, whereas the most heroic acts performed in opposition to this virtue, lose all their value in His sight. To eat and drink when directed by obedience, is an action in itself so pleasing to God, that it acquires for you a great degree of merit ; but, to fast even for a year on bread and water contrary to obedience, would not only be without merit, but even most displeasing to God. Great is the difference in the opinion of men between

the discharge of the lowly duties of a household, and preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world; nevertheless the former, if fulfilled through obedience, is very meritorious in the sight of God, whereas, the latter, if undertaken through self-will, is odious and unacceptable to Him. The will of God alone can sanctify our actions. If, like the ancient solitaries, you were to pass your entire life in the employment of basket-making, you could not, provided you did so in obedience to the will of God, perform an act of greater merit, or more pleasing to Him. Return in spirit to the humble abode at Nazareth; you will there behold Jesus at work in Joseph's shop, and be assured, that His lowly occupation is more exalted than our imperfect understanding can comprehend. And why? Because He is acting in obedience to the will of His Eternal Father.

Third advantage.—The obedient soul infallibly, and in a very short time, attains perfect sanctity; and that for two reasons. First, because obedience contains in itself the very essence of sanctity and perfection, inasmuch as sanctity consists in the perfect fulfilment of the will of God. The obedient soul, therefore, who does nothing but what God wills, whether she rests or is at work, meditates or is employed in active duties, is every moment of the day and night occupied in doing the Divine Will, and must necessarily attain a high degree of sanctity, and that too, in a very short time. Secondly, God cherishes the obedient soul. He embraces her with more love than does the most tender mother her beloved infant, He rules and governs her by His sweet Providence, and ordains everything for her greater good. Hell and the world

may conspire against her, superiors even, may treat her harshly, but all their efforts will be fruitless, because she is under the protection of a God infinitely wise, powerful, and loving, who will infallibly lead her to the degree of sanctity He has destined for her here, and in the next life to that throne of glory, prepared for her from all eternity.

Affections

It is certain that superiors are the representatives of God in our regard, and therefore, we ought promptly and punctually to obey their orders. Jesus Christ, who is truth itself, has said, "He that hears you, hears Me, and he that despises you, despises Me."—*Luke* x. 16. Henceforth, my God, I will submit my will and judgment to that of my superiors, I will consider their will as Thine, their orders as Thy orders, and that I cannot fail in obedience to them without disobeying Thee. This is my firm belief, and I believe it because Thou, O my Jesus, hast said it.

My hope in Thee, Divine Redeemer, is unbounded. To Thee, in the person of my superiors, I have solemnly vowed obedience; I have consecrated to Thee my entire will and liberty; deign to accept the sacrifice I have made, and be Thou Thyself, henceforth, my Guide in the person of my superiors. I abandon myself and all that regards me, unreservedly to the disposition of Thy divine Providence. Thy infinite wisdom will inspire my superiors to ordain what will be most salutary for me, and Thy infinite goodness will so regulate their orders, as to render them profitable to me. Thou who art Truth itself, hast made this promise, and therefore I cannot doubt the fulfilment of it. I

confidently hope, my God, that Thou wilt dispose all things so advantageously for the benefit of my soul, that I shall at last attain to that degree of glory Thou hast destined for me in heaven from all eternity.

With this confidence, my great and sovereign Good, I humble myself in the abyss of my nothingness, and consecrate myself entirely and unreservedly to Thee—I now renew the vow of obedience I solemnly made Thee. I consecrate to Thee my liberty, will and understanding, and place myself entirely at the disposal of my superiors ; I am resolved, with Thy grace, to do in all things as they shall direct. I will listen to the voice of my superiors as to the voice of God, and obey them simply and unhesitatingly—their will, when not opposed to Thy holy law, shall be mine—I will no longer be guided by my own judgment, nor will I ever again ask, desire, or refuse anything, but place myself entirely at the disposal of Thy divine Providence, in the person of my superiors. This oblation I now make of myself, purely because Thou, divine Jesus, art my great and sovereign Good, whom I desire to love perfectly on earth, and to enjoy eternally in heaven. Grant that I may persevere in these, my good resolutions, to the last hour of my life. Amen.

THIRD MEDITATION

On the public Life of Jesus Christ, and on His admirable Meekness and Charity towards the Neighbour

FIRST POINT

Jesus Christ, for the love of us, underwent all the trials attendant on the exercise of charity and

forbearance towards others, and these are not unfrequently bitter and painful to nature.

You are now about to consider a virtue most essential for the attainment of sanctity, and at the same time, practically fraught with many trials and difficulties. Consider attentively the example given you by Jesus Christ, and resolve to suffer like Him, who endured so much for love of you. The first trial with which charity has to contend, is that of having to deal with persons on whom labour and services are thrown away.

Great were the labours endured by Jesus Christ for the conversion of the Jews. During the three years of His public life He journeyed from place to place, to preach to them; He lavished upon them His choicest graces; He wrought miracles in their favour, and, like a loving father, invited them to partake of His mercy. What return did they make for so much love? Some reviled Him, and deridingly called Him the son of a carpenter; others ridiculed His heavenly doctrine; the Pharisees reproached Him as an evil-doer and transgressor of the law; the High Priests publicly accused Him of teaching false doctrine, and were indefatigable in warning the people not to allow themselves to be seduced by Him, and they at last went so far as to expel from the synagogue all who adhered to Him. Very few of the multitudes that heard Him were converted; all the rest remained obstinate, thus rendering His labours almost fruitless. Must it not then have been difficult for the Heart of Jesus Christ to have loved such a class of persons? Even the most tender and loving father cannot look with affection upon the son, who, despising all his

admonitions, is to him continually a new source of sorrow.

The second trial with which charity has to contend, is that of having to deal with persons who, through envy or hatred, misinterpret every action. Jesus had to endure this trial during the whole course of His public life. If, through compassion for the sick and suffering, He healed them on the Sabbath day, He was denounced as a violator of the Sabbath ; if He eat at table with sinners and publicans, in order to win them by His sweetness and charity to repentance, He was censured as a glutton, who sought to gratify His appetite at the expense of others. The miracles He wrought to prove His divinity, were attributed not to any power of His, but to that of the demon, who worked in Him. In a word, all that He did was misinterpreted.

The third trial with which charity has to contend, is that of having to deal with persons who are not only ungrateful for benefits received, but even repay these benefits with ingratitude. Jesus came to Nazareth—He preached in the Synagogue—He treated everyone with the most tender and disinterested charity. What return did He receive for all His love ? Nothing but ingratitude, as might be expected from those who return evil for good—they conducted Him to the summit of a high rock, in order to cast Him headlong from it. He preached also in Jerusalem. He told His people that He was the Son of God and the promised Messiah, so long expected by them, but in return for the truth He announced, they called Him a blasphemer, and threatened to stone Him to death.

The fourth trial charity has to contend with, is that

of having to deal with perfidious and hypocritical characters. Jesus saw the heart of Judas—He knew the little love he bore Him—that he would one day sell and betray Him for a few pieces of silver, and deliver Him into the hands of His enemies.

The fifth trial with which charity has to contend is that of having to deal with persons whom we know entertain feelings of hatred towards us. The High Priests and Scribes had long resolved in private council to put Jesus to death ; they had publicly declared that all His disciples and followers should be excluded from the synagogue ; they issued a decree for the seizure and deliverance into their hands of Him Whom they called a seducer, and moreover, formed other diabolical schemes against Him. Now consider how great and numerous were the trials which the charity of Jesus had to surmount, in continuing to love this perfidious people, who justly merited his eternal hatred. But how did He act towards these ungrateful men ? This shall form the subject of some of the following Meditations ; for the present we will confine ourselves to the fact that Jesus loved this people with the tenderest love.

Affections

How tender and ardent, O Jesus, was Thy love for us, how cold and languishing is mine for Thee ! Thy chosen people outraged, injured, and insulted Thee ; one of Thy disciples even betrayed Thee with a kiss, and delivered Thee into the hands of Thy enemies, who had resolved not to rest till they had crucified Thee. What an indignity was thus offered to the majesty of God ! But the ingratitude of Thy people could not extinguish the flames of Thy charity. Thou

didst love them unto death, even unto the death of the cross! Alas! I am totally devoid of the meekness and charity of Jesus Christ! An unkind look, a harsh word, a refusal, a slight offence, suffices to extinguish the virtue of charity in me, and to give rise in my breast to feelings of anger and indignation. After so many graces received, and so many means afforded me of advancing in this greatest of all virtues, behold, O Jesus, the little progress I have made! How shall I one day appear before Thee, destitute as I am of this virtue?

But shall it always be so? Shall my heart ever remain cold and tepid, and full of self-love? Will the time, beloved Redeemer, never come when I shall have the consolation of imitating Thy meekness and charity? If it do not, what a misfortune for me! I have been called to a state of life pre-eminently holy, in which it becomes my imperative duty to imitate Thy meekness and charity. How could I appear before Thee destitute of these virtues? Great, indeed, will be the account I shall have to give of the innumerable graces I have received, and of which I have profited so little. Henceforth, O Jesus, I consecrate to Thee my whole heart.

SECOND POINT

Of the admirable Qualities of the Love of Jesus for Mankind

Endeavour, my soul, to enter into the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and there you will learn how to love.

First, the meekness of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ was unalterable, and His charity was ever most inflamed. Jesus was infinitely powerful and omniscient

and he was, therefore, not ignorant that His enemies hated Him, considered Him an impostor, a blasphemer, a sorcerer : they calumniated and despised Him, loaded him with insults, censure, and ridicule, and even sought to crucify Him ; still, He took no revenge, nor did His Sacred Heart cease for one moment to burn with the most ardent love for them. What would be your feelings if even a few individuals made it their business to persecute and calumniate you, to stigmatise you as an impostor, and finally sought to put you to death ?

Second, the meekness and charity of Jesus Christ rendered Him always sweet, gentle, and affable, not only in His words, but in His manner and intercourse with all, notwithstanding the outrages committed against Him. Consider again the perfidy of Judas. Jesus knew this disciple's ungrateful heart, and that he it was who would betray Him. This knowledge, however, did not diminish his love for him. During three years, Jesus had the traitor always with Him. He treated him with the same affection as the other apostles, and bestowed upon him the gift of miracles—when He washed His disciples' feet He also washed those of Judas, so that even at the last supper the other apostles were ignorant of his traitorous design. Moreover, when Jesus was delivered by him into the hands of His enemies, He called him by the tender name of friend, and received from him the perfidious kiss. Could He have treated His beloved apostle John with greater tenderness ?

Third, the meekness and charity of Jesus Christ were ever kind and generous. He returned good for evil to those who loaded Him with injuries. The rage and fury of the Jews daily increased against Jesus,

and in return He heaped graces and benefits upon them—He offered to His Eternal Father the most fervent prayers for their salvation, and wrought stupendous miracles, to force upon them, if possible, a knowledge of His Divinity—He lavished new favours upon them, to soften the obduracy of their hearts—He even bestowed benefits upon them at the very time they were most grievously offending Him. What benignity did he not exercise towards Malchus, a vile servant, who was one of those who came to the garden to apprehend Jesus ! at the very moment this wretched man was executing his diabolical attempt, Jesus stretched forth His sacred hand, restored the ear which Peter had cut off, and healed him.

Affections

Now, dearest Jesus, I understand what it is to love. To love those who love me and are kind and good to me is to love my neighbour merely as the Jews and Pagans did ; but to love those who hate, persecute, and calumniate me, is to love as Thou, my Redeemer, didst love. How have I hitherto loved my neighbour ? Alas ! quite otherwise than as Thou hast commanded me to love him ! I have sinned against charity, the greatest of all virtues, the characteristic virtue of the Religious state, and the very foundation of sanctity and perfection. O my Jesus, I detest from the bottom of my heart, and am sorry for the innumerable sins by which I have offended against Thy favourite virtue, and through the merits of Thy most precious Blood, I humbly ask pardon. Henceforward it shall be my study to love Thee, my God, with my whole heart and above all things, and for Thy sake to love my neighbour

as myself. These are the two chief precepts Thou hast taught us, both by word and example. From this moment, and during the remainder of my life, I am resolved, aided by Thy grace, to reduce them to practice. I love Thee, dearest Jesus, more than anything in heaven or on earth. I desire to love Thee so ardently, as willingly to shed my blood and sacrifice my life for Thee. I desire to love Thee for Thy own sake, and to love all creatures solely for love of Thee. Thou didst die for all, and dost command me to love all, and for Thy sake I will love them as myself. I entreat Thee, beloved Redeemer, to have mercy on all whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy most precious Blood, and to grant them every temporal and spiritual blessing which I could desire for myself. These are holy affections, but they are confined to the heart. Charity must be made manifest; it cannot remain inactive, otherwise it would no longer be entitled to the name of charity. How ought I to act towards my neighbour? I will do to others in future as I would wish to be done by. I desire that all should entertain a good opinion of me, treat me with cordiality and affection, bear patiently with my defects and weaknesses, and render me every service in their power. I will, therefore, not entertain any suspicion or rash judgment against my neighbour, nor utter any word which might lessen him in the esteem of others; I will treat him with all charity; avoid saying or doing anything which could vex or distress him, willingly bear with his defects, and do all I can to serve him. O Jesus! who art the very essence of charity, grant that I may love Thee, and love my neighbour, as Thou hast loved me.

Fifth Day

FIRST MEDITATION

On the Fruit to be drawn from the preceding Meditations

HAVING already considered the exalted virtues and example of Jesus Christ, let us now consider how we should imitate Him. You are holy and perfect only inasmuch as you live according to the Spirit of Jesus Christ. If you desire to know what progress you have made in virtue, you may easily form some idea on the subject, by comparing your life with the Spirit which animated your divine Model. If you have but little of His Spirit, you are far removed from perfection—if you are wholly actuated by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, you are far advanced in sanctity. He is Sanctity itself, and the Model of every virtue; the more closely, therefore, you resemble Him, the more holy and perfect you will become. In proportion as you are animated by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, will be your practice of the virtues of obedience, humility, meekness, and charity. Jesus Christ, during His entire life, practised every virtue in the highest perfection; and it is certain that of none did He give more illustrious examples than of the four just mentioned. Two of these He most strenuously recommended to His followers, because they contain the essence of His Spirit, and lead to the most exalted sanctity. "Learn

of Me," said He, "for I am meek and humble of heart."—*Matt.* ix. 29.

The reason so few attain to sanctity, even in the most holy religious institutes, where sanctity abounds, is because they do not model themselves on the virtues of Jesus Christ. The greater number of Religious content themselves with certain practices of piety, which are not opposed to their natural and unmortified inclinations. They acquit themselves of the duty of prayer and meditation regularly, discharge diligently the offices assigned them, and perform practices of penance and all the austerities prescribed by their rule, but they will not renounce their own will—submit with perfect indifference to the orders of their superiors—eradicate from their hearts every germ of vain glory—accept humiliations cheerfully—repress generously all feelings of anger—treat with kindness and affection those who are opposed to them—return in everything good for evil, and on every occasion subdue self-love; these are practices which few, and only those who are gifted with heroic hearts, have courage to undertake. Hence it is, that the heart so often remains a slave to its inordinate affections, and devoid of those virtues which would render it so pleasing to God; and that, God communicating Himself but rarely to such souls, they live and die without having ever made any progress in solid virtue. But if you be really desirous and determined to attain perfection and an intimate union with God, it is absolutely necessary for you to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, and to imitate His virtues. I will now briefly point out to you how this may be done.

AS REGARDS OBEDIENCE

First: in the presence of God, make an act of total indifference as to the orders of your superiors—neither seek, reject, nor desire any duty or office, but take humbly and willingly whatever obedience may assign you.

Second: always view God in the person of your superiors, and under every circumstance believe firmly that their will is the will of God in your regard.

Third: receive with respect and reverence every order they give, and fulfil it with joy and alacrity.

AS REGARDS HUMILITY

First: sacrifice to God every desire of being honoured and esteemed; banish from your heart every sentiment of vanity and self-love, and never say or do anything from a motive of vain-glory.

Second: abandon your honour and reputation into the hands of God, and keep your soul prepared to be despised every hour—nay, every quarter of an hour, if such be His holy will.

Third: receive contempt and humiliations cheerfully, from whatever quarter they may come, and endeavour to bear them willingly, in the true spirit of humility and self-contempt.

AS REGARDS MEEKNESS AND CHARITY

First: let your heart if possible overflow with tenderness for all; never entertain deliberately any suspicion, rash judgment, or feeling of disdain, anger, or indignation against any person.

Second: treat all persons, under every circumstance, with cordiality and affection.

Third: bear in silence whatever injuries you may receive, and if in your power, return good for evil.

The whole spirit of Jesus Christ is comprised in the foregoing points. By reducing them to practice, you will become a true imitation of His virtues. If therefore, you are disposed to copy this great Model, and become the living image of Jesus Christ, throw yourself in spirit at His sacred feet, and consecrate yourself to Him by the following act: "Thy spirit, O Jesus, is to hate honour—love contempt—deny self-will—obey others—treat all persons with love and affection—bear in silence their faults and weaknesses—in short to love every one with cordiality, and to return good for evil. Yes, such is Thy spirit, most amiable Redeemer, and the example Thou hast given me, which I must follow if I desire to be Thy true disciple; it is the only means by which I can attain to Thy love, and to union with Thee. Thou art sanctity itself, and wilt not take up Thy abode in a heart which is not weaned from all inordinate affections, and adorned with Thy virtues. What ardent love, intimate conversation, and close union should I not now have with Thee, my Jesus, had I died to myself, and lived according to Thy Spirit! Alas! of how many immense blessings have I deprived myself! But thanks, praise, and infinite blessings be given to Thee, my Sovereign Good! all is not yet lost! I understand, owing to Thy great mercy and compassion, what Thy Spirit requires of me, and the way which leads to Thee. There is yet time to purify my heart from every inordinate affection. I may still, dearest Lord, regain Thy friendship, experience all the effects of Thy holy love, and attain to the closest union with Thee. O

sweet hope! I may yet belong entirely to God, I who have so often offended Him, abused so many graces, and, during so many years, slighted His most loving invitations. O infinitely good and merciful Jesus! I now come to offer myself to Thee; give me, I beseech of Thee, grace to imitate Thee during the remainder of my life, by the practice of every virtue."

SECOND MEDITATION

On the Two Standards

The third week of the Exercises of St. Ignatius begins with this Meditation, the object of which is the following of Jesus Christ. It would be impossible to follow Jesus Christ, to live according to his Spirit, and imitate His virtues, without having to encounter many and great difficulties, obstacles, and contradictions, which can only be surmounted by a generous and magnanimous heart. St. Ignatius, therefore, proposes to us the example of Jesus Christ for our imitation, that we may be encouraged not to shrink from suffering for that loving Redeemer, who vouchsafed to suffer so much for love of us. In the meditation of this day, you are called upon to make a firm resolution, cost what it may, to follow Jesus Christ, and to live according to His Spirit. St. Ignatius proposes for your choice two captains, each of whom invites you to enlist under his standard. These two leaders are Jesus Christ and Lucifer.

FIRST POINT

As we must necessarily follow either Jesus Christ or Lucifer, let us examine the ends these two leaders

have in view. Jesus Christ ardently desires that all men should follow Him, and thereby obtain eternal beatitude in Heaven, where they will bless and praise His Heavenly Father for all eternity. In this desire He is actuated by the twofold love with which His Sacred Heart is inflamed ; He loves His Eternal Father, and therefore desires that He should be praised, honoured, and loved by all men ; He loves man, and wishes that he should labour for his salvation, and partake of that eternal beatitude which He Himself enjoys.

Lucifer, on the other hand, endeavours to enlist all men under his banner ; he induces them first to abandon God, then to despise Him, and thereby merit for themselves eternal damnation. In this he is actuated by a twofold hatred. He bears an implacable hatred against God. From the moment the Divine Justice banished Lucifer out of paradise, the hatred he conceived for the Almighty has been, and still is, so great, that he cannot endure that God should be praised, loved, or honoured by any of the human race. He also bears an implacable hatred against man. Knowing that God has destined him for that glory and infinite beatitude which he and the rebel angels forfeited, he vehemently desires to deprive man of his happiness, and to draw him into the same infernal abyss with himself.

Now these two leaders present themselves to you ; which of them will you follow ? Jesus Christ or Lucifer ? When the young Tobias was about to undertake a journey to a distant country, the Archangel Raphael presented himself to him, under the appearance of a young man, and offered to be his guide and

companion. Now let us suppose that two young men had presented themselves to Tobias, one the Archangel Raphael, and the other Lucifer, and that they both offered him their services. Had the young Tobias in such a case rejected the Archangel, and chosen Lucifer for his guide, would he not have brought upon himself the greatest imaginable misfortune ? Now, you have begun your journey to eternity, which is long and perilous. Jesus Christ and Lucifer both present themselves to you as leaders ; which of them will you choose ?

Affections

The choice is a most important one ! I am travelling towards eternity. I know not the way that leads to it, but I know it is beset with snares and dangers. Two guides present themselves to me, Jesus Christ and Lucifer. Jesus, the only Son of the Eternal Father, who is sanctity itself, who loves me most tenderly, and earnestly desires my happiness. Oh, how safe to follow such a guide !

The second is Lucifer, the greatest enemy of God, a damned spirit, who bears me an implacable hatred, and is only intent on my eternal ruin. What course shall I adopt ? I should blush at such a question ! Were I to abandon Jesus and follow Lucifer, forsake the road which leads to heaven, and pursue that which conducts to hell, I should have lost my senses, and justly deserve the execration of all creatures. No ! that shall never be. Thou, my Jesus, art the Way—the Truth—and the Life. The Way that securely leads to the Father, the Truth that will discover to me every snare and artifice of the devil, and the life wherein

alone eternal beatitude is to be found. Enrol me, beloved Jesus, under Thy banner. I will follow Thee, even unto death.

SECOND POINT

If you must follow either Jesus Christ or Lucifer, it is of the utmost importance that you should know the end to which both these captains will ultimately lead you. Vast is the difference; first, between the invitation of Jesus Christ and that of Lucifer, and secondly, between the end to which these two leaders will conduct you. Consider both attentively.

The invitations which Jesus Christ gives to His followers have no attractions for human nature. On the contrary, they are most repugnant to self-love, and principally consist of the following, namely: voluntary poverty—blind obedience—denial of self-will—humility—patient endurance of injuries and contempt—silence when humbled and persecuted—acts of thanksgiving to God in the time of trial and suffering—such is the spirit of Jesus Christ. To the practice of these virtues He invites His followers; and to the acquisition of these you must aspire if you wish to combat under His banner. I admit that a life spent in such practices may seem bitter and painful, but Oh, how sweet and delightful the end to which it will lead! What is the end? Deliverance from eternal misery, which is hell, and the possession of an infinite and never-ending happiness, which is heaven.

The invitations Lucifer gives to his followers are flattering to nature and self-love. He promises temporal advantages—riches—honour—glory—the esteem of men—ease—every kind of convenience—a happy

life, and the full gratification of every desire and passion. Such is the spirit of Lucifer,—such are the promises he makes to his followers. But, to what will this crafty and reprobate spirit lead them? My soul, be not deceived! He will ultimately lead you to the loss of an eternal good, which is heaven, and to an infinite evil, which is hell.

Here pause a moment. Raise your eyes, and imagine that heaven opens to your view, and that you behold Jesus Christ seated at the right hand of His Eternal Father, surrounded by a multitude of His elect, arrayed in dazzling glory and splendour. Who are those so very near to Jesus? They are the apostles, who were obliged to flee from city to city, were dragged from prison to prison, and persecuted by all. They are monks, hermits, and apostolic men, who promoted the glory of God amidst insults, outrages, and persecutions. They are virgins, who, for love of Jesus Christ, bore patiently and in silence, trials, injuries, temptations, and every other adversity, all of whom now live and reign with Christ, and are the nearer to Him in glory, as they followed Him the more closely upon earth.

Pause again—look down and imagine that the Earth opens beneath you, and discloses hell to your view; that you there behold Lucifer, surrounded by a multitude of damned souls, immersed in a lake of fire, and suffering inconceivable pains and torments. But, who are those miserable souls so close to him? How widely different is the position of the votaries of the world in this life from what it will be in the next: These are powerful kings and queens, who during life were little less than adored, the abuse of

whose abundant riches and temporal blessings cast them headlong into Hell; they are persons of either sex, who during life enjoyed all the splendour and magnificence of high rank, their pride merited for them also the flames of hell; they are men and women who lived here in the enjoyment of every pleasure, every gratification of the senses, and every indulgence of the passions, but whose only distinction now is, the intensity of the fire which surrounds them. They closely followed Lucifer as their guide whilst on earth, blinded as they were by his allurements, and they are now the nearest to him in hell, where, with him, they are condemned to suffer the most excruciating torments.

Affections

The more I study Thy life, O my Jesus, who art the Model of all sanctity, the more clearly I perceive the blindness of my understanding and the perversity of my will. Whilst on earth, Thou didst esteem only poverty, contempt, injuries, sufferings, afflictions, and privations. Thou didst proclaim aloud that these were the certain means to attain sanctity here, and a high degree of glory in heaven. That temporal blessings, such as riches, honours, worldly glory, pleasures, and sensual enjoyments, ought to be despised and regarded as the most dangerous incentives to vice, which would ultimately conduct us to hell. Such, beloved Jesus, is Thy judgment, Thy doctrine, and Thy spirit, such the sentiments of Thy Sacred Heart. But, how different are Thy judgments from mine! What reason have I not to blush and be confounded! I am unworthy to look upon Thee hanging on the cross. What Thou didst despise, I esteem; what Thou didst

covet, I avoid ; what Thou didst love, I detest ; what Thou didst accept, I refuse. I have even received with coldness and ingratitude Thy most loving invitations. Could my heart less resemble Thine, had I made an express and formal resolution to enlist under the banner of Lucifer ? It now only remains for me, dear Jesus, to approach Thee, that I may consider attentively the example of every virtue which Thou hast given me. Prostrate in Thy sacred presence I am resolved, with the assistance of Thy grace, to love what Thou hast loved, and to hate and avoid whatever is displeasing to Thee.

THIRD POINT

Consider the end to which Jesus Christ means to conduct you, by having called you to the Religious state. Ponder again the end of your creation. By the grace of vocation to the Religious life, gratuitously bestowed upon you, you are bound to love and serve God with greater perfection in this life, and are destined to enjoy a more exalted degree of glory in the next. But, how can this be, if you be not a faithful imitator of the virtues of Jesus Christ ? To understand this, consider attentively the following truths :—First, perfect charity is a great and rare gift of God, Who, though infinitely powerful and wise, and the inexhaustible source of every perfection, cannot bestow upon you a more sublime or valuable gift than that of divine love and intimate union with Himself. This is the gift of gifts, the greatest of all blessings, and the most precious jewel in the treasury of God's mercies. Now, the soul that has received this gift during life attains to a higher degree of glory in heaven than

myriads of other souls less favoured. Secondly, no one can obtain this grace but through the means ordained by Almighty God. Perfect charity is a gift of God's mercy, which He is no more obliged to bestow upon you, than a monarch could be said to be obliged to raise an humble peasant to the dignity of being his spouse, and the partner of his throne. Therefore, as this grace is gratuitous, it is but just that God should prescribe His own conditions for its attainment. Thirdly, the condition on which alone it is to be obtained is the imitation of Jesus Christ. "I am the door," says this most amiable and loving Redeemer; "by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and he shall go in and go out, and shall find pastures"—*John* x. 9. The Eternal Father says, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him"—*Matt.* xvii. 5. You see, therefore, the only door to sanctity is Jesus Christ—the only model of sanctity proposed to us by the Eternal Father is Jesus Christ—the only teacher of sanctity is Jesus Christ. If you enter in at this door, you will attain perfection, you will love God with a pure and disinterested love, and you will be intimately united to Him. But remember that out of Jesus, all is but illusion, deceit, and death.

Affections

How different, Divine Redeemer, are Thy judgments from mine! Thou who art the eternal Truth hast declared that in poverty I shall find riches—in contempt real glory—in persecutions true peace—in subjection perfect liberty—and in imitating Thee the secure road to sanctity. To do this I must mortify my senses, and moreover, embrace the cross for love

of Thee. I believe this, beloved Jesus, because Thou hast not only taught, but practised it. I moreover believe that if I act, love, and suffer as Thou hast acted, loved, and suffered, I may hope, even in this life, to enjoy Thy intimate friendship. To act otherwise would be but illusion, imposture, hypocrisy, and vanity.

Yes, most loving Redeemer! Thou art my great and only Good, in whom my whole happiness consists. I long for, and ardently desire to possess Thee. I desire to love Thee with all perfection here, and to enjoy hereafter that degree of glory which Thou hast destined for me from eternity. The road to sanctity is narrow and strewed with thorns. Total renunciation of the will, meek endurance of injuries, an affectionate intercourse with those who are uncongenial to me, are all virtues which require great generosity of soul. Nature may shudder and complain, but I am firmly resolved to make every sacrifice to follow Thee. How can I refuse to do so or find it burdensome to obey through love of Jesus, who obeyed the most unjust and iniquitous judge for love of me? Jesus, for love of me, subjected Himself to all manner of insults and outrages, was crucified between two thieves, and loved not only His enemies, but even His very executioners. How then can I refuse to imitate His example or to suffer for love of Him who suffered so much for love of me? I love Thee, dearest Jesus, and I ardently desire to be united to Thee, to walk in Thy footsteps, to suffer like Thee, and to do what Thou didst. Deign to infuse into me Thy divine spirit, which is a spirit of submission, of meekness, and of love.

THIRD MEDITATION

On the Three Classes of Men

FIRST POINT

The first class of the followers of Jesus Christ comprises those who profess a desire to attain perfection, but follow Christ only in word and not in deed. The dispositions of such persons may be compared to those of an invalid, who desires to be cured, but refuses to take the remedies prescribed. She is suffering from fever, which every hour increases, and threatens her with death. The physician is sent for, he visits and examines her, and intimates that her case is a very bad one. He, however, adds that it is not altogether hopeless, and if the patient will only submit to the remedies prescribed, her life may be saved. But, unfortunately, she will not obey. She is aware of her danger, expresses a great desire to recover, but as to the remedies, she altogether rejects them. Can such a person really desire to recover her health? So it is with a Religious who lives in a state of habitual tepidity. She is told her malady is not hopeless or incurable, that nothing more is required of her than to perform her spiritual exercises with fervour—to acquit herself of all her duties with a spirit of love and with purity of intention—to walk continually in the presence of God—to make frequent use of ejaculatory prayers—to practise interior mortification generously, and to make daily the sacrifice of herself to God, than which nothing can be more pleasing to Him; and that by so doing, she will very soon recover her spiritual health, and love

God more ardently than ever. These measures, however, she will not adopt. "I desire," does she say, "to attain perfection, but the means prescribed are too difficult; I neither can nor will adopt them." Now, can such a soul really desire to attain perfection? Woe to her! What innumerable evils will she not entail upon herself! First, in punishment of her tepidity, God will permit the tepid soul to fall into mortal sin. He has exemplified her case by two parables. He says of the barren land, that "the earth which is copiously watered and bringeth not forth fruit, is near a curse." He says on another occasion, "I would thou wert cold or hot. But, because thou art luke-warm, neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth."—*Apoc.* iii. 15, 16.

Secondly, God may permit the tepid soul, if she persevere in her tepidity, to forfeit the grace of salvation. This truth is likewise exemplified by two parables. The first is that of the barren fig-tree, against which Jesus pronounced the following curse: "May no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever."—*Matt.* xxi. 19. The second is the fig-tree planted in the vineyard which bore no fruit for three years, and was condemned by the Lord of the vineyard to be cut down. "Cut down," said He, "this tree; why cumbereth it the ground?"—*Luke* xiii. 7. Now, who pronounced these awful words?

Affections

I am penetrated with fear and terror, most loving Jesus, when I consider that these threats were uttered by Thy sacred lips! I may yet be damned! I, who have been called by God to the Religious state,

enriched with so many choice graces, and destined for a most exalted degree of glory in heaven. Yes ; it is but too true that I may be lost, and it is my tepidity which will open to me the road to damnation. O tepidity ! what a monster must thou be, since thou canst compel the most merciful heart of God to cast me from him for ever.

Have patience with me, most loving Redeemer ! I detest with my whole heart my past tepidity and negligence in Thy service, and the abuse of the many helps and graces Thou hast so liberally bestowed upon me. I have hitherto lived regardless of the glory of Thy most holy name, and reckless of my salvation. Thou hast deigned this day mercifully to enlighten me, to know the sins and wickedness of my past life. I sincerely detest them, and am firmly resolved from this moment, with the assistance of Thy grace, to lead a new life.

SECOND POINT

The second class comprises those who follow Jesus Christ in some things only, but will not do so in all. The case of such souls is similar to that of a sick person, who does not indeed reject all the remedies prescribed, but refuses those that are disagreeable or painful. What can be said of such a person ? She is, it is true, anxious for her recovery, but she is wanting in courage and resolution. Such is exactly the case with many Religious. They desire to attain perfection, and are even willing to make use of some of the means to acquire it, but they will not bear with patience interior desolation—trials and temptations—humiliations—contempt, or other things painful to

self-love, and in their opinion too hard to be borne. Like the sick person alluded to, such souls are not wanting in good will, but they refuse all such remedies as are disagreeable. Mark the consequences, let them sink deeply into your heart. A soul in such dispositions will pass her life without receiving from God any interior consolation. As she has neglected to acquire the virtues of holy indifference and perfect resignation to the Divine Will, her evil inclinations remain unsubdued; hence, pride, vanity, caprice, attachment to her own will and judgment, anger, talkativeness, melancholy, haughtiness of manner, and overbearing conduct towards her neighbour, defects which she brought to the cloister, will, after the lapse of many years, be as deeply rooted in her heart as they were the first day she entered Religion. These passions will go on increasing like a stately growing tree, which every succeeding year becomes more and more lofty and gigantic. To such a soul the yoke of obedience will daily become more intolerable—humiliations more insupportable—her liberty of speech more and more unrestrained and overbearing—and her behaviour more haughty and disdainful. What peace or consolation can dwell in a heart thus governed by passion? The will when unmortified is to the soul what a living asp is in the human body. While this venemous reptile sleeps its hapless victim is at rest, but no sooner does it awake, than it bites and torments the unfortunate being into whose vitals it has entered. So it is with a tepid Religious, who enjoys a false peace and quiet as long as her passions are lulled; but if they be in any way aroused, what a tumult and conflict will arise within her! So blind is she, that she does not discover the

source of her spiritual miseries, which in reality is in the heart, but attributes her faults to other causes, which are merely secondary or accidental. Such a Religious can never make any progress in perfection. God Himself, whose word is infallible, has said: "Whosoever does not renounce all things, cannot be my disciple."—*Luke* xiv. 33. That is, those who will not renounce all creatures, and unreservedly resign themselves to my will, can never acquire my love, or attain to intimate union with me. Why? Because God being the Sovereign Lord of all things, it is at His option to bestow or withhold those special graces necessary for the attainment of perfection. Now, can the Religious who does not place herself entirely in His hands hope for these graces? What reason would she have to complain were they withheld from her? God, who is our Supreme Lord, has a right to command all the affections of our hearts. He will not yield His right thereto, or admit to union with Him those who will not unreservedly devote themselves to His love and service.

Affections

The sick person whose case I have been considering is a striking image of my soul. She rejects every remedy which would restore her bodily health, and I refuse to use the means necessary for the cure of my soul. I desire to be meek, humble, obedient, and charitable; but never to be subjected to contempt, contradictions, or humiliations: in a word, I desire to become a saint, provided it cost me nothing. Now, such a disposition is diametrically opposed to the will of my Heavenly Father, to the doctrine and example

of Jesus Christ, and to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. What folly! No true follower of Jesus Christ has ever yet been exempt from labour and suffering. I too must suffer, and die to myself, if I desire to attain perfection. Yes; Thy doctrine, dearest Jesus, teaches me that this is the only road to sanctity. I desire then to suffer with Thee, and for love of Thee, and I will endeavour to subdue my passions and to mortify my evil inclinations.

It would, indeed, be folly to shrink from the passing pain which the mortifications of my natural inclinations would inflict, and thus entail upon myself a far greater misery, that of being the victim of my unsubdued passions to the detriment of my soul. By yielding to the impulse of pride, anger, or self-will, we are thrown into a state of tumult and agitation; whereas, acts of humility, meekness, and obedience, impart to us that peace and happiness which are the reward of the triumph of grace over nature. Now, since I must necessarily suffer, either by mortifying my passions, or from the indulgence of them, I will, Divine Redeemer, mortify them for love of Thee.

THIRD POINT

The third class of the followers of Christ comprises those souls who have a firm and courageous desire to acquire perfection, for the attainment of which they are ready and willing, not only to do in all things the will of God, but to suffer whatever He may require. The advantages gained by persons in such dispositions are the following:

They will infallibly attain perfection. The liberality with which God communicates Himself to man is

proportioned to the generosity with which man gives himself to God. As the soul in this third class gives herself to God, and is willing to do and suffer whatever He pleases, He in return gives Himself entirely to her, and in a very short time she will most certainly attain to sanctity and to an intimate union with God. Union or close friendship with God is the reward promised to perfect charity. "If anyone love Me," says our Divine Redeemer, "he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him."—*John* xiv. 23. Now, who may we suppose to have attained to this perfect degree of charity, which shall be rewarded by so great a privilege? Those undoubtedly who have given themselves unreservedly to God.

They will infallibly receive other sublime graces. God, who is infinitely liberal, will not be outdone by those who devote themselves entirely to His love and service. He will impart to them a heavenly joy, peace, and tranquillity of heart, a most tender and ardent love for Himself, and besides an abundance of other choice graces, the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Such is the hundredfold promised by Jesus Christ to those who for love of Him deny themselves, and leave all things to follow Him.

Affections

Enlightened by Thy Grace, my God, I now understand the means I ought to adopt in order to attain perfection, the most certain of which is entire abandonment of myself into Thy hands. What goodness, what mercy! How many graces hast Thou not lavished upon me! Their number ought to make me tremble,

because "unto whom soever much is given, of him much shall be required," and to "whom they have committed much, of him they will demand the more." —*Luke* xii. 48. Great, indeed, will be my misery if, after having received such an abundance of graces, I should in the end merit, on account of my abuse of these graces, to be cast headlong into the abyss of hell. It is certain that for some souls there is no medium; if they do not labour to attain that high degree of glory which was destined to reward the heroic virtue they were called upon to practise while on earth, they will never be saved. I may, for aught I know, be among the number of these souls. O terrible thought! From this day forward, nay, from this very moment, I commit myself entirely to the disposal of Thy loving Providence. Teach me the way in which I should go, I resign myself in all things to Thy most holy will. One grace alone I earnestly ask of Thee, and that is, to live and die in the closest and most intimate friendship with Thee. Whatever afflictions may befall me I shall henceforth consider as ordained for me by Thy paternal love, and I will embrace them with perfect submission to Thy adorable will, as being the surest means of attaining sanctity. Strengthen me, O Jesus, in these my holy resolutions.

Sixth Day

FIRST MEDITATION

On the Third Degree of Humility, or on the Love of Contempt

FIRST POINT

NOTHING can be more reasonable and just than that we should endeavour to love contempt. The understanding of man is so darkened, and self-esteem so deeply rooted in his heart, that he considers contempt and humiliations as the greatest of evils. It is certain, however, that contempt is our due, and that were all men to unite in despising us, their contempt would fall far short of what we deserve. Consider attentively the following truths.

As God is infinitely Just, He must necessarily punish sin. This is of faith. Being likewise infinitely Good, He must also reward virtue. Now God can punish sin in any manner He pleases. As He is infinitely just and powerful, He can, in punishment of sin, inflict on guilty man pains both of body and mind; but contempt seems to be the most appropriate punishment of sin, seeing that sin in itself is a mark of contempt against God. Therefore, it is only just that the sinner who has had the audacity to despise his Creator, should, in punishment of his temerity, be despised and contemned.

God can make use of any instrument He pleases for the punishment of sin. He punished the sin of

David by means of his son Absalom ; that of the disobedient Prophet by a wild beast which tore him to pieces ; and the sin of the impious Heliodorus by means of an Angel, who scourged him to death. Our sins he punished in the person of his only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, by means of Judas, the treacherous Apostle who betrayed Him. God can also punish you by humiliations, or afflict you in any other way He pleases, in chastisement for your sins.

However severely God may punish sin in this world, its punishment is always less than it deserves. Were He to prolong your life till the day of judgment and were you to suffer all manner of privations, injuries, contempt, and humiliations, you could never thereby make sufficient atonement for the injury offered to the infinite majesty of God, even by one venial sin. Consider now the innumerable sins you have committed, for which God can punish you by humiliations, or in any other way He pleases, and reflect what ought to be the dispositions of your heart ? You ought never to complain of any insults you may receive ; under all humiliations, how great soever, you ought to praise and bless God, and be persuaded that it is only just that you should be despised, and undergo during the whole course of your life every species of contempt and humiliation.

Affections

I acknowledge, my God, that I deserve all manner of contempt, and that I should consider it as an effect of Thy mercy to me. The united insults of all men would be as nothing compared with what I deserve. Hadst Thou, my Jesus, dealt with me according to

the rigour of Thy justice, where should I now be? Alas! my conscience tells me I should now be in hell, where I should long since have been an object of contempt to the angels and saints in heaven, and to men upon earth. In Thy mercy, O my Jesus, Thou hast saved me from eternal reprobation, and in atonement for my sins, Thou dost only require of me to bear with patience the little passing contempt or humiliations which I may have to undergo in the order of Thy loving Providence. I will, therefore, accept them from Thy most merciful hand, and endeavour to bear them with equanimity of soul. This I will do, dearest Jesus, with the assistance of Thy grace, and I will endeavour faithfully to keep my promise. I have sinned, and on account of my sins, have deserved to be held in execration for eternity by all creatures. I will ever bear this truth deeply engraven on my mind, and whenever I am despised, I will praise and bless Thy infinite Goodness and Mercy.

SECOND POINT

Our own interest should make us love contempt. Humiliations, it is true, present nothing but what is bitter and painful to nature, but how many things, exceedingly disagreeable in themselves, and most repugnant to nature, do we desire and seek, in the hope of obtaining some greater good! A remedy, however bitter or painful, would not fail to be acceptable to a sick person, if he were certain it would either cure his malady or afford him relief. How is it, then, that we shrink from contempt, considering the immense advantages we derive therefrom? What are these advantages? First—Contempt uproots

pride from the soul. Pride and vain glory are the most dangerous and deep-rooted diseases of our souls, and are the greatest obstacles in our way to perfection; for as long as there remains in the heart one germ of self-esteem, self-complacency, or the desire of applause, God will not take up His permanent abode there. He resists the proud—He hates and withdraws Himself from them. He will not bestow upon them His choicest graces, His supernatural lights, inflamed affections, or divine inspirations, and He will withhold from them the special guidance of His Providence. What greater misfortune could befall those who are called to perfection? But how remedy so great an evil? By humiliations, which are, of all others, the most certain and most efficacious means. As an abundant supply of water speedily extinguishes a conflagration, so do humiliations subdue and eradicate pride. Ought you not, therefore, ardently to desire humiliations, and to bless, praise, and thank God, when he affords you an opportunity of being despised? Were you suffering intensely from toothache, would you not feel most grateful to the dentist, who, by the momentary pain of extraction, would deliver you from the torture you were enduring? How great, then, ought your gratitude be to God, who, in subjecting you to some passing humiliations, mercifully intends thereby to deliver you from the great evil of pride!

Secondly—Contempt infuses the virtue of humility into the soul. Humility is one of the most essential dispositions for perfection. When God, who penetrates the heart, sees it humble, He there takes up His abode and imparts to it His most abundant graces. As the streams flowing from the mountains into the valleys

fertilise the soil, and render it productive of abundant crops, so does divine grace, which is withdrawn from the proud and haughty, flow into the valleys, that is, into the hearts of the humble, and enrich them with every virtue. Could we possess a greater treasure than the virtue of humility? What are the means to acquire this virtue, so dear to the heart of Jesus? Meditate on the life of your Redeemer. He descended from heaven to be your model and guide, and has pointed out to you the most effectual means of becoming like unto Him, namely, the silent and patient endurance of contempt and insults. If, following His example, you learn to suffer lovingly and in silence, He will infallibly bestow upon you His own spirit, which is the spirit of humility.

Affections

I am now conscious, beloved Jesus, that the desire of being praised, esteemed, honoured, and preferred to others in everything, renders my heart so displeasing and odious to Thee, and prevents Thee from taking entire possession thereof. Accursed ambition! of how many graces, supernatural lights, and spiritual consolations hast thou deprived me! Thou hast separated me from God, and still bringest upon me many other evils. Unless, my God, I eradicate from my heart this dreadful passion, which is so deeply rooted therein, all my labour will be in vain, and I never can attain to an intimate union with Thee. A proud worm of the earth cannot be united to a God-man so humble and, as it were, annihilated. My heart, O Jesus, must be thoroughly changed, it must in future love and embrace humiliations; but unless aided by

Thy grace, all my resolutions will be fruitless. Pride is so deeply implanted in my heart, that of myself I am unable to uproot it. I have a thousand times detested this sin, and as many times relapsed into it. I alone am to blame for the failure of all my resolutions. Were they sincere, I would love and be grateful to those who contemn me, and accept joyfully every occasion which Thy loving providence may afford me of practising self-abasement. I know, divine Redeemer, that Thy omnipotent hand alone can destroy my pride. Look in pity upon me, take from my heart every desire of being esteemed, and grant that Thy holy Spirit may ever reign triumphant in my soul.

THIRD POINT

Contempt merits our love and esteem, on account of its excellence. Were we aware how highly God values humiliations, we would not only embrace, but even ardently desire them, however repugnant they might be to corrupt nature. Consider now, attentively, the excellence of humiliations patiently borne for the love of God.

First.—The most agreeable sacrifice we can offer to God in this life, is the patient and silent endurance of contempt. The desire of appearing to advantage, of gaining a reputation and the esteem of men, is a passion so universal, that hardly anyone is free from it. Some there are, who find no difficulty in sacrificing every comfort of life, who subdue their bodies by fasting, watching, and other austerities—others love solitude, spend many hours daily in prayer, meditation, and other spiritual exercises—others, again, bear with an almost heroic patience the most acute bodily pains

and infirmities, and their desire of suffering cannot be satiated; yet these very persons, apparently so advanced in virtue, not unfrequently cannot bear an insult, a calumny, or even the slightest contemptuous word in silence. Here their virtue vanishes, and their apparent sanctity generally splits upon this rock. The more deeply rooted this passion is in the heart, the more difficult it is to eradicate it; and so great is the violence necessary to subdue this spiritual enemy, that those who labour to do so, have continually a most pleasing and acceptable sacrifice to offer to God.

Second.—The patient endurance of contempt and humiliations is the very essence of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. If you consider attentively the life of Jesus Christ, you will find it replete with contempt and humiliations of every kind. His time was not always employed in active duties, His exterior sufferings were not without some alleviation, but never for one moment of His mortal life did he cease to suffer contempt. He was despised at His birth in the stable of Bethlehem; in His flight into Egypt, while yet an infant; in His youth, in the shop at Nazareth; in manhood, during His public missions; and at his death on the cross. His doctrine, virtues, and miracles, His sacred humanity, and His divinity, were likewise despised. Meekness and humility being the characteristic virtues of Jesus Christ, our divine Model, we cannot acquire His spirit, unless we endeavour to practise these great virtues.

Third.—The patient endurance of humiliations opens to the soul an entrance into the most loving and Sacred Heart of Jesus, and disposes it for the most intimate union with Him. To seek Jesus,

without at the same time loving humiliations, would be to seek Him in vain. Prayer, fasting, watching, and similar devout exercises, will not suffice ; we must die to ourselves by embracing humiliations—we must put on the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and if we desire to gain access to His Sacred Heart, we must, like Him, love to be despised. Those who thus love Jesus Christ, are loved by Him ; He enlightens them on His most hidden secrets—He consoles and gives them to taste of the sweetness of His love—He treats familiarly with them, and admits them to the closest union with himself. To such souls, He will, even in this life, fulfil the promise He made in these words : " Behold, I stand at the gate and knock. If any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me."—*Apoc.* iii. 20.

Have we not reason to lament the blindness and dullness of our understanding, in having heretofore made so bad a use of contempt and humiliations ! Ought we not to desire, esteem, and embrace with joy, that which Jesus so much prized ? Alas ! what enemies are we to ourselves to deprive ourselves of so inestimable a blessing, which cannot be equalled on earth ! How truly do we resemble the sick person before mentioned, who, though desirous of being cured, will not take the remedies prescribed !

Affections

I know, beloved Jesus, that as long as the vice of vain-glory predominates in my heart, Thou canst never enter there, nor can I ever hope to be intimately united to Thee. I must labour to destroy in myself the desire of being esteemed, and exert every effort

to substitute in its place the love of contempt. Deign, divine Redeemer, to accept the unreserved offering I now make Thee of myself. Hear my prayer, and strengthen me to persevere in the following resolutions :

1. With Thy grace, I will in future endeavour to renounce every vain and ambitious thought, every desire of being loved and esteemed by creatures, and should I be praised or honoured, I will reject the feeling of self-complacency arising therefrom, because I know they are displeasing to Thee.

2. I will endeavour with my whole heart not only to love, but cheerfully to accept contempt. I will bear in silence and for love to Thee whatever humiliations Thou shalt in Thy mercy permit to befall me, and I will praise and thank Thee for them as for the greatest blessings Thou couldst bestow upon me. From this moment I also renounce for the love of Thee my honour and reputation. Vouchsafe to accept this sacrifice, most loving Jesus, and as Thy Eternal Father was glorified by Thy life of sufferings and humiliations, so grant that I, in like manner, may glorify Him and Thee. This offering I desire daily to renew. May it be on my lips and in my heart during life and at my death. Thou alone canst strengthen me to be faithful to my resolutions. Without Thy aid, all my good desires and intentions will vanish like smoke. Turn, then, most loving Jesus, Thine eyes of mercy towards me, make my heart in all things like to Thine. Teach me to love what Thou lovest, to hate what is displeasing to Thee, and to contemn all vanity and the esteem of creatures. These graces I earnestly beseech Thee to grant me.

SECOND MEDITATION

On the interior Sufferings of Jesus Christ

FIRST POINT

Jesus Christ suffered in His soul all those interior trials which we have to encounter in the way to perfection. Imagine you behold our Divine Redeemer in the garden of Gethsemani; enter the interior of His Sacred Heart, and beg of Him to enlighten you on the overwhelming anguish with which He was there oppressed, when in extreme desolation and bitterness of heart He exclaimed, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death."—*Matt.* xxvi. 38.

The first suffering of Jesus was an intense sadness which arose from two causes. The first was His ardent love for mankind. The fondest mother never loved her only child so tenderly as Jesus loved all men in general and each one in particular. The second was His infinite knowledge, by which He foresaw that, notwithstanding His Passion, the greater part of mankind would be eternally lost. This thought filled Him with such sadness, that had He been without other sufferings, it alone would have sufficed to cause His death. That we may be able to form some idea of the sadness of Jesus Christ, let us imagine the anguish of a mother, who having left her beloved children playing in a field, should find them on her return torn to pieces by a wild beast from an adjoining forest, which, after having cruelly tortured them, left their tender limbs scattered here and there, mangled and bleeding. What would be the grief of this mother at such a heart-rending sight? Enter now into the Sacred Heart of

Jesus, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow, on beholding so many souls who would be condemned to hell, for whose redemption He was about to shed the last drop of His most precious Blood.

The second interior suffering of Jesus Christ was fear. Nothing so cruelly oppresses the human heart as the fear approaching dissolution. It has not unfrequently happened that even men in the vigour of youth and health have in one night become gray after the sentence of death had been pronounced against them. Now, what anguish must not the Sacred Heart of Jesus have suffered from the apprehension of His approaching death, all the awful circumstances of which were intimately present to His mind!

The third suffering of Jesus Christ arose from His interior conflicts. Nature and grace combined to agonise His Sacred Heart; as man He had to conflict with the fear of death and the ingratitude of sinful man; hence, His agony became so great, that, turning to His Eternal Father, He addressed to Him these pathetic words: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me."—*Matt.* xxvi. 39. But as God He desired the completion of His sacrifice, and immediately added, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."—*Matt.* xxiv. 39. Oh! who can imagine the violence of the interior conflict Jesus suffered on this occasion! It so far exceeded what His Sacred Humanity could endure as to draw from Him a copious sweat of blood.

The fourth interior suffering of Jesus Christ was His mortal agony. Man has never so great a claim to our compassion as when in the agony of death. Imagine you behold a dying man, his brow bedewed

with a cold sweat, caused by the interior conflicts which he endures; his hands and feet cold and stiff, he breathes with the greatest difficulty, his heart throbs violently, his pains of body and mind are intense and continually increasing, and he can obtain no relief. He is an object of the greatest compassion to all who behold him. Now, such were the interior sufferings of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemani, as to throw Him into so terrible an agony that He must certainly have expired had not His Eternal Father strengthened Him to consummate His sacrifice.

Affections

Redeemer of the world, how great were Thy sufferings, and how great Thy fortitude! Thy soul was plunged into an ocean of sadness, bitterness, and affliction. Anguish, fear, distress, and desolation, a mortal agony like tempestuous waves, agitated Thy Sacred Heart, but in the midst of this fierce tumult Thy constancy was invincible. Yes! though in an agony, Thou didst pray the longer, Thou didst resign Thy will to that of Thy Eternal Father, nor didst Thou refuse to suffer, and even to die the ignominious death of the cross. Thus do those act who truly love and serve God, and perfectly accomplish His adorable will. My sufferings, most afflicted Jesus, compared with Thine, are nothing; and yet every little trial suffices to make me abandon my good resolutions, and sufferings only produce in me tepidity, neglect of prayer, and other spiritual exercises, inconstancy in my good resolutions, dissipation of mind, cowardice and dejection. What a subject of confusion and humiliation for me! How can I

appear in Thy divine Presence! Thou, who art holiness and innocence itself, subjected Thyself to all manner of sufferings, and I, a vile sinner, seek and desire nothing so much as consolation. What a source of humiliation for me! Jesus, who never sinned, is sorrowful even unto death (*Matt.* xxvi. 38), and I, who on account of my many and grievous sins have merited only chastisement, seek for consolation. I acknowledge, divine Redeemer, that I have erred, and I bitterly deplore my folly. I will never again complain of my interior sufferings; I will unite them to Thine in the garden of Gethsemani; my sole desire is to please Thee, and with the assistance of Thy grace, I am resolved to love, seek, and glorify Thee alone, alike in spiritual dryness and consolation.

SECOND POINT

The state of interior desolation is much more advantageous for the soul than that of spiritual delights. Were we fully enlightened and thoroughly impressed with this truth, we would not only willingly, but with joy, pass our entire life in a state of aridity. You will be able to form a just estimate of the value of interior sufferings by considering attentively the following truths:—

First truth.—The soul, in a state of interior desolation, is capable of making to God an offering the most acceptable to Him. How great is our delusion even with regard to spiritual things! If by chance we enjoy interior peace and sensible devotion and are favoured with the gift of tears, we esteem ourselves most happy. But how much more profitable for us is the time of desolation! The day on which God bestows sensible

favours upon us, we consider the happiest of our lives, but that day we give Him nothing. He invites us to His table, gives us to taste of His sweetness, is all generosity to us, but we make Him no return. Alas! how many are faithful to God in the time of consolation, how very few equally so in the time of desolation! To be faithful in the duty of prayer—interior recollection—mortification—and every other spiritual exercise, while we are deprived of all light and comfort—suffering from the revolt of the passions—and assailed by all kinds of temptations, is indeed a sacrifice most pleasing to God, and one which He regards with the most tender love.

Second truth.—Interior desolation leads the soul more securely to the attainment of the perfect love of God, than a state of interior consolation. To love God perfectly, we must in all things seek to know and do His will, regardless of every other consideration. Those who have arrived at this state have already attained a high degree of the love of God, and are consequently most pleasing to Him, but interior desolation is by far the most certain means to attain eminent sanctity.

A soul faithful in this trying state seeks no comfort from creatures, and God at the same time withdrawing from her every interior consolation, she remains, as it were, crucified. By this means she learns by degrees to die to herself and to every creature—to place her sole happiness in the perfect accomplishment of the Divine Will—to abandon herself wholly to God, and thus attain to the perfection of divine love.

Third truth.—Interior desolation leads the soul most securely and speedily to intimate union with

God. As fire purifies gold and makes it brilliant and beautiful, so does interior desolation purify the soul from every earthly affection, make it most dear to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and dispose it for the most intimate union with God. Filled with heavenly light and inflamed with divine love, such a soul may be likened to a room heated and illumined by the sun, after the curtain which prevented its rays from penetrating therein has been withdrawn. Such is not the case with those who enjoy spiritual consolation, because this state being pleasing to nature and self-love, there is scarcely one in a thousand who by means of it could attain to union with God. How preferable, then, must be the state of interior trial!

Affections

I behold Thee, dearest Jesus, reduced for love of me to a state of the most extreme anguish and mental agony, to teach me how beneficial the state of interior desolation is, as a means of uniting me closely to God. Why am I so ungenerous as not to accept it? Prostrate before Thee, most loving Jesus! I consecrate my whole being to Thee. I will joyfully submit to the dispensation of Thy divine Providence—I am satisfied to be deprived of all interior consolation and sensible devotion, and to suffer darkness, desolation, sadness, temptations, and whatever else Thou shalt please to send me. I will endeavour faithfully to do Thy will. It shall henceforth be my joy and happiness to be deprived of every spiritual comfort and support with Thee and for Thee, if such be Thy Holy will in my regard.

But, most merciful Jesus, of myself, unaided by

Thy grace, I can do nothing. Those who seek no comfort from creatures, and who remain faithful to Thee amidst interior darkness, aridity, and desolation, when assailed by the most violent temptations, tormented by the most horrible thoughts, a prey to interior sadness, fear, desolation, and the revolt of all the passions, have attained that high degree of perfection which comprises true self-denial, total detachment from creatures, persevering fidelity to grace, ardent charity, and which will ultimately lead to the most intimate union with God. But a great and efficacious grace is necessary to practise such exalted virtue, and God alone can bestow it upon me.

THIRD MEDITATION

On the exterior Sufferings of Jesus Christ

FIRST POINT

The bodily sufferings of Jesus Christ far exceeded whatever could be endured by man. Let us consider attentively the following circumstances in detail, and from them we may form some idea of the intensity of His sufferings during His Sacred Passion. First—The sufferings of Jesus Christ were universal. Cast your eyes on His sacred body, and see if there be one part of it free from the most excruciating pain. Behold His sacred cheeks swollen and livid with blows; His mouth parched with thirst and drenched with vinegar and gall; His hair and beard mercilessly plucked; His head pierced with a crown of sharp thorns; His eyes covered with blood; His flesh, nerves, back, chest, His tender and loving breast;

and every part of His body mercilessly mangled; His sinews contracted; His veins and arteries opened; His blood flowing from every pore; His bones laid bare; His hands and feet pierced with gross nails; and His most sacred body become one continued wound. Isaiah the prophet, who saw Him in spirit, thus describes Him: "There is no beauty in Him or comeliness, and we have seen Him the most abject of men, a Man of Sorrows. Surely He has borne our infirmities and carried our griefs, and we have thought Him, as it were, a leper, and as one stricken of God and afflicted."—*Isaias* liii. 2, 3, 4. Secondly—The sufferings of Jesus were intense, far exceeding human endurance, and this for two reasons. First, on account of the tenderness and delicacy of His sacred flesh, which, according to St. Bonaventure, was so great, that He had a sensibility unknown to other mortals, by reason of the peculiar perfection of all his senses, and He suffered more than any other man could have felt under the same excessive tortures, as the exquisite and singular delicacy of His frame made Him more alive to painful impressions. Secondly, because He was tortured in the most sensitive parts of His sacred body. What agonising pain must He not have endured from the crown of thorns which was pressed upon His sacred head, and not only pierced the flesh, but penetrated even to His very temples, and from the streams of blood which issuing from these wounds flowed into His eyes and down His sacred face! What inexpressible torture when His sacred hands and feet were cruelly fastened to the cross with huge nails, which rent His sacred flesh, veins, and sinews! What a martyrdom to be suspended on the cross with no

other support than the nails which suspended His lacerated body and deprived him of every means of alleviating His torments! Thirdly, the sufferings of Jesus were without mitigation. He had already hung some hours on the cross, and shed His most precious blood nearly to the last drop, when, faint and parched by intense thirst, He asked for a drink. Could a more scanty refreshment than a draught of water be demanded by an Incarnate God, sinking and dying in a sea of anguish? Yet even this trifling relief was denied Him, and to increase His torments, His executioners presented Him only vinegar and gall. Such was the treatment experienced by the world's blessed Redeemer, even in His last moments.

Affections

O crucified Jesus! I am lost in astonishment, and know not what to say or think. Had it been possible for Thee to have committted as many crimes and merited as many hells as I have, the Justice of Thy Eternal Father could not have fallen more heavily upon Thee. But Thou who art sanctity itself, didst choose to undergo those cruel torments for my salvation. It is of faith that Jesus endured a bloody sweat in the garden—was cruelly scourged—derided as a fool—and died as a malefactor on the cross, to make satisfaction for my sins. With what goodness and mercy, most loving Jesus, hast Thou not treated me! Would that I had a thousand tongues to bless and praise Thee as I could desire! With all the affection of my heart I thank Thee, most merciful Saviour, for every drop of blood Thou didst shed, for every wound Thou didst receive, for every insult Thou didst

endure, and for all Thou didst suffer on the cross for love of me.

Not only didst Thou pray for me, Thy enemy, but for my sake Thou didst likewise give Thy life on Calvary. I must, therefore, suffer, to correspond with such love. Nothing can be more just, and with the assistance of Thy grace, I will endeavour to be faithful to the following resolutions which I now make in Thy divine presence. I will humbly submit to every dispensation of Thy Eternal Father in my regard, and willingly accept of all trials—sickness—infirmities—and whatever other afflictions He may please to send me. May Thy adorable will be ever done in me. The time and circumstances of my death are not hidden from Thee. I will likewise submit, with the most profound resignation, to Thy adorable decrees with regard to it. Grant that like Thee I may suffer and die in the sentiments of the most ardent charity.

SECOND POINT

The intense sufferings of Jesus Christ, and the barbarity with which He was treated during His Passion, could only be equalled by His admirable patience, as will appear from the following circumstances when considered attentively.

1. Jesus suffered in silence, and uttered no complaint. The Holy Ghost likens Him to a Lamb which is bound and led to the slaughter, without making the least resistance or opening its mouth. Thus did Jesus suffer Himself to be seized, ignominiously treated, most cruelly scourged, crowned with thorns, and though faint and exhausted from loss of blood, to be burdened with the heavy weight

of the cross, to have His hands and feet pierced with nails, and finally to be crucified. Still he was silent. He said of Himself by the mouth of the Royal Prophet, " I was dumb and opened not My mouth."—*Ps.* xxxviii. 10. Such is the example given us by our suffering Redeemer. Have we hitherto imitated Him ?

2. Jesus suffered with unalterable meekness. Never was there a man who had so much reason to complain as Jesus had when on the cross. First—Because He was universally hated by the Jews. The secret thoughts and feelings of the multitudes who surrounded Him during His Sacred Passion, and stood beneath Him on Mount Calvary, were not hidden from Him. What did He see in their hearts ? Nothing but hatred, revenge, ill-will, joy, pleasure, and exultation at His sufferings and death ; they even hoped and desired that His name might become extinct and effaced from the memory of man. In the second place, Jesus had reason to complain on account of the contempt, derisions, and blasphemies of the Scribes and Pharisees, who, shaking their heads and mocking Him, exclaimed, " Vah ! Thou who destroyest the temple of God, and in three days dost rebuild it, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross."—*Matt.* xvii. 40. " He saved others, Himself He cannot save."—*v.* 42. Might not Jesus have justly complained, at being thus blasphemed in the midst of His extreme sufferings ? But no ; such was His ardent charity, that, forgetful of Himself and of His own wrongs and sufferings, He thought only of the salvation of His enemies. Hence it was that He said to the women who wept through compassion

for Him, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." —*Luke* xxiii. 28.

3. Jesus suffered with the most admirable fortitude and an ardent desire to suffer still more. Contemplate Jesus as He hangs upon the cross—His strength exhausted—His sufferings now at their height—and His enfeebled body no longer able to resist the power of death. How is He occupied? Enter into His Sacred Heart, and behold the stupendous strength of His love. It is twofold, and enkindles in Him two desires. The love He bears His Eternal Father makes Him desire to live longer, that He may suffer more for love of Him—the love He bears to man gives rise to the same desire, which He expresses in these words: "I thirst."—*John* xix. 28; and again, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—*Matt.* xxvii. 46. As if He would say, Father, why dost Thou not allow Me to live longer, and suffer more for love of Thee, and for love of man?

Affections

With what fear and confusion should not my soul be penetrated when I behold Jesus hanging on the cross! His venerable head crowned with thorns, His divine eyes obscured with blood, His sacred hands and feet nailed to the cross, and His most loving Heart opened by a lance! Yet Jesus was innocence itself; He never sinned. Why, therefore, is He tormented? Alas! He suffers not for His own sins, but for mine. My sins have wounded His Sacred Heart! My sins have crucified Him! Though guilty of such enormous and multiplied sins, I refuse to suffer.

I will not even admit that I am deserving of chastisement. Mayest Thou be eternally praised, most loving Jesus, that I am now thoroughly convinced, that there is no pain or torment in hell which I have not most justly merited on account of my sins. However much I may have hitherto suffered, or how great soever my future sufferings may be, they could never of themselves cancel one of my innumerable sins or make the smallest satisfaction for them. Oh, how unreasonable then for me to complain under afflictions! My sufferings, however great, fall infinitely short of what I deserve. Is it not then incumbent upon me, divine Jesus, to submit in all things to Thy most holy will, and to praise and bless Thy most loving dispensations in my regard? Yes; it is most just that I should suffer. I am resolved, with the assistance of Thy grace, to accept with resignation every trial and affliction which Thou shalt be pleased to send me during the remainder of my life.

Seventh Day

FIRST MEDITATION

On the Ignominies of Jesus Christ

FIRST POINT

THERE never was, nor shall there ever be, anyone who suffered, or who could suffer, so many outrages and ignominies as did Jesus Christ. It would be utterly impossible within the limits of one meditation to enumerate all the insults and ignominies to which He subjected Himself for love of us. We shall, however, examine some of them in detail, and their consideration should serve to overwhelm us with shame and confusion for our intolerable pride.

The first injury was calumny and false accusations. Nothing could be more galling to a noble-minded and generous-hearted man than to be falsely accused of crimes which he never even so much as thought of committing. Attend in spirit the tribunals of Annas and of Caiphas and listen to the atrocious crimes with which Jesus is charged. False witnesses are suborned, who accuse Him of being a drunkard ; of eating with publicans and sinners ; of calling Himself the Son of God ; of teaching false doctrine and introducing idolatry among the people ; of being a sorcerer, who wrought miracles by the agency of the Devil ; and of being a seducer and perverter of the nation. Such were the crimes for which Jesus was arraigned at the tribunals of the High Priests and at that of

Pilate, and which were proclaimed everywhere throughout the streets and public places of Jerusalem.

The second injury to which Jesus was subjected was mockery and derision. Not satisfied with calling Jesus a blasphemer and sorcerer, the Jews moreover derided Him as a fool. Behold Him at the tribunal of Herod. He who was Wisdom itself made no reply to the many questions which were put to Him, and was, therefore, treated as a fool by Herod and his courtiers, and as such, was arrayed in a white garment amidst the scorns and derision of an insolent mob, and thus dragged through the most crowded streets back to the tribunal of Pilate. To this outrage succeeded another perhaps more violent and more ignominious, in the palace of the Roman governor. Instigated by the Jews, the soldiers agreed to make Jesus the subject of a cruel sport, such as demons alone could have devised. Having placed Him in the centre of the court-yard, they put on Him a purple garment, placed a reed in His hand, and pressed a platted crown of thorns on His Sacred Head. Then, after having drawn themselves up in array, they advanced one after another to Jesus, and bending the knee in derision and saluting Him King of the Jews, they struck Him and spat in His Sacred Face. While the whole celestial court beheld in amazement the indignities offered to the Incarnate God, and would have wept, were it possible, a vast multitude of people gazed upon the unusual spectacle, and by their shouts and repeated acclamations added to the ridicule and mockery heaped upon the world's Redeemer.

The third injury inflicted on Jesus was the disgraceful death to which He was condemned. Pilate

was convinced of the innocence of Jesus, and desiring to release Him, asked the multitude assembled around his palace, "Whom will you that I release to you, Barabbas or Jesus?"—*Matt.* xxvii. 17. Moved at the instigation of the chief priests and ancients, the people vociferated, "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas."—*Luke* xxiii. 18. One, who for murder and sedition had been cast into prison, was to be released, and Jesus executed. Such was the wish of the people, who were instant with loud voices, requiring that Barabbas should be set at liberty and that Jesus should die. If Jesus must die, what death is He to suffer? His death must be the most cruel and ignominious—He must be crucified like the most infamous malefactor—and die between two thieves—that the world may know He has surpassed all others in crime. Such was the desire of the people, such the sentence of Pilate. Jesus was accordingly led forth to die on the cross, amidst the exultations of the high priests, the blasphemies of the Scribes and Pharisees, and the still more insulting mockery of an immense concourse of people. Then was indeed verified the prediction of the Royal Prophet, who spoke thus in the person of Jesus Christ: "I am a worm and no man, the reproach of men and the outcast of the people."—*Ps.* xxi. 7. Now, let me ask you, was the sentence of the Eternal Father unjust, by which He condemned His only-begotten Son to so much ignominy? Certainly not. Jesus had taken upon Himself our iniquities, and, therefore, should atone for them. Again, would you consider yourself injured were you by the permission of God, to be as insulted and ill-treated as was His only and beloved

Son? No; for contempt is due to sin, and your conscience must accuse you of having committed many crimes. Once more, would not your pride be intolerable, if, knowing the chastisements due to sin, you should refuse to bear a slight humiliation? How great would be your ingratitude should you refuse to bear a trifling insult for love of Jesus, who suffered so many and unheard of injuries for love of you!

Affections

O Jesus, beloved Redeemer, in Thy humility I behold what is more astonishing than Thy most stupendous miracles. Thou, who art infinite Wisdom, who rulest both heaven and earth, art declared a fool, derided as a mock king, and spit upon as the vilest of men. Thou, who art infinite Sanctity, from whom alone all heavenly gifts and graces flow, the Messiah, and the Desired of all nations, wast called a hypocrite and a lover of wine. Thou, my Jesus, wast accused of being a seducer, a blasphemer, a Samaritan, a sorcerer, and wert reputed more criminal than a murderer. Without uttering one word of complaint, Thou didst endure all in silence, with an unparalleled meekness and patience. O humility, O silence of Jesus! Such a sacrifice would of itself have sufficed to make satisfaction to the Eternal Father, and to inspire all creatures to love and practise humility.

Thy humility, most loving Redeemer, must render my pride still more detestable in Thy sight! I, whose understanding is darkened by sin and ignorance, desire to be reputed wise and prudent—whilst Thou, who art infinite Wisdom, art led through the public streets clad in a fool's garment, and made a laughing

stock of the people. I desire to be esteemed innocent —whilst Thou, who art innocence itself, art reputed a seducer, a blasphemer, and a sorcerer. I, who am totally devoid of virtue and full of vice, expect to be preferred to all—whilst Thou, who art Sanctity itself, art set aside for Barabbas, and condemned to the infamous death of the cross. Intolerable pride! How odious must thou be in the sight of my Redeemer! O Jesus, have mercy on me, grant me a new understanding, and change all the perverse inclinations of my will.

SECOND POINT

Never, from the beginning of the world, did anyone suffer such outrages and ignominies with so much humility as Jesus. The Royal Prophet expresses our Blessed Redeemer's truly marvellous humility in these words: "He became as a deaf man who heard not, and as a dumb man not opening His mouth."—*Ps.* xxxvii. 14. Consider these few words, and admire the stupendous humility concealed under so incomprehensible a silence.

First, Jesus was innocence itself, and therefore no evil could be imputed to Him. The crimes of which He was accused were the malicious inventions of His enemies. Had Jesus chosen to justify Himself, He could in one moment have proved His innocence, silenced His enemies, and covered them with shame and confusion. Secondly, Jesus was omnipotent. One word from Him would have sufficed to bring down thunderbolts from heaven upon His enemies and precipitate them into hell. With one word alone, He could have made all men acknowledge His divinity, and all Jerusalem adore Him as the long-expected

Messiah. Thirdly, Jesus was omniscient. He knew His enemies would take advantage of His silence, and that they would never rest until they had seen Him expire ignominiously on the cross—He knew that His beloved Mother and His Apostles would suffer by His silence—that His enemies would thence take occasion to question His miracles—condemn His doctrine, and persecute His infant Church—all this He knew, but still so many and such powerful reasons were insufficient to extort from Him one word in His own justification. He was silent—and silent unto death. O Jesus, most admirable! how wonderful is Thy silence, how sublime the lesson Thou dost teach me thereby, and how unprecedented Thy example! But, alas! how few are there who imitate Thee! Where are the persons to be found who, like Jesus, can be silent in the midst of scorn and insult? Some there are, who can submit to inconveniences and mortifications, especially if they are of their own choice; but to be silent when humbled—to endure censure and calumny, to be unruffled when unjustly accused, is indeed an exercise which few can bear. It is, however, undeniably true, that to follow the example of Jesus is the only way to acquire sanctity, and whoever does not imitate Him, will never advance in virtue, and can never hope to attain perfection.

Affections

Jesus most humble, how admirable is Thy doctrine, how far exceeding all worldly wisdom! Insults, contempt, and humiliations possess as many charms for Thee as honour and distinction have for me. Why are my sentiments so different from Thine, and

why do I not love what Thou didst love? Yes, most loving Jesus, I now understand that contempt is the most powerful means to conquer pride, which is my deadly enemy, and that the virtue of humility is the key which will open for me an entrance into Thy Sacred Heart, and the brightest gem I can acquire on earth for the adornment of my soul in heaven.

How great has been my blindness, most loving Jesus! What more pleasing sacrifice could I have made to Thee than that of my honour, by bearing affronts and humiliations in silence, thereby to prove to Thee at least my desire to love Thee? But, alas! I have been sadly wanting in generosity! The most favourable time for making this sacrifice was that in which I was censured and calumniated—despised and humbled, not that in which I was penetrated with a tender and sensible feeling of devotion, and felt my heart inflamed with love for Thee. Great indeed was my error to have repined when I should have rejoiced—to have avoided what I should have sought—and to have murmured when I should have been silent. Now that I understand what Thou demandest of me, I will endeavour to follow Thy example, Who, when the hour of Thy agony drew nigh, didst say, "That the world may know that I love the Father, arise, let us go."—*John* xiv. 31. These were Thy words, and Thou didst deliver Thyself courageously into the hands of Thy enemies, from whom Thou couldst only expect insults and ill usage. I will also endeavour to imitate Thee, when occasions of humiliation and self-abasement present themselves, and to prove the sincerity of my desire to love Thee, I will say, "Arise, my soul, let us go willingly to meet sufferings for the love of Jesus."

SECOND MEDITATION

On the Love manifested by Jesus Christ for His Enemies on the Cross

FIRST POINT

The love of Jesus for His enemies was a prodigy of love. Go in spirit to Calvary, and consider attentively the love of Jesus for His enemies. Behold Thy Redeemer, hanging by three nails from an infamous gibbet; His sacred body one continued wound, His precious blood streaming from every vein. His whole Being abyssed in an ocean of sorrow, and ready to breathe His last sigh. Behold again the enraged assembly of every age, rank, and condition; young and old, nobles and plebeians, Jews and Gentiles, Scribes and Pharisees, elders of the people and chief priests, who, instead of compassionating their dying Saviour, as did the few devout women who wept over him, gave full scope to their implacable hatred. Let us consider the circumstances of this hatred, and we shall then be able to judge what the difficulty must have been, to love such a barbarous and inhuman people.

First circumstance.—The joy and triumph of His enemies. Here you are not to consider Jesus Christ purely as man, but as the Man-God, to whom the secrets of all hearts were open. While agonising on the cross, what malice did He not see in the hearts of His enemies! He saw some exult at beholding Him crucified, who congratulated each other upon the desired hour having at length arrived when the seducer

should receive the retribution justly due to His crimes. Others approved the sentence pronounced against Him, and said it was but just that a criminal and blasphemer such as He was should die on a cross between two thieves. Some again rejoiced that He was presented with vinegar and gall to drink instead of water, when, exhausted from suffering and loss of blood, He exclaimed "I thirst," while others awaited His death with a diabolical impatience and even expressed the hope that His name might be effaced from the memory of man. All this Jesus saw in the hearts of those for whose salvation He had descended from Heaven and subjected Himself to the miseries of human nature. He saw the crimes of those for whom He had performed so many and such stupendous miracles, and for whose redemption He was now going to sacrifice His life. Great, indeed, must have been His love for this people, which so much hatred could not diminish!

Second circumstance.—The scorn and ridicule of His enemies. When a culprit condemned to death appears upon the scaffold, the most profound silence reigns around, the hardest hearts are moved to pity and compassion, and the sympathy he excites is proportioned to the severity of the sentence about to be executed. Jesus alone was deemed unworthy of this compassion. The more cruel His sufferings and the more barbarous His sentence the more unfeeling were the scoffs and derision of His enemies. They exultingly exclaimed, "Vah! Thou that destroyest the temple of God, and in three days buildest it up again, save Thyself, coming down from the cross."—*Mark* xv. 29, 30; "He trusted in God, let Him now deliver Him

if He will have Him, for He said, I am the Son of God."—*Matt.* xxvii. 43.

Third circumstance.—The obstinacy of His enemies. It would have been comparatively easy for Jesus to have loved his enemies, if in the end they would have acknowledged His Divinity and detested their crimes, but such was their obstinacy as to render this impossible. Even the elements bore testimony to the innocence of Jesus: "the heavens were darkened, the sun obscured, the rocks were split, the earth trembled, and the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom."—*Mark* xv. 38. Though the multitudes witnessed these prodigies, they persevered in their cruelty; they became even so infuriated against Jesus, as to curse and blaspheme Him: nor did they cease to persecute and torture Him until death. Jesus bore all with heroic patience, and, unmindful of his own sufferings and ignominies, He turned to His Eternal Father, to plead their cause, and besought Him to pardon their iniquities. Was there ever love equal to this? It would not have been difficult for Jesus to have loved His enemies, had He foreseen that even after His death they would cease to hate Him, but He had not this consolation. He knew that the greater number would disbelieve the miracles He would perform after His resurrection; that they would persecute and put to death His Apostles, who were to announce His name; that they would persevere in their crimes, and blaspheme Him eternally in hell. How difficult must it have been for Jesus to love such a wicked and perverse race! Still He was not angry with His people; instead of calling down vengeance from Heaven upon them to

avenge His death, He prayed that His Sacred Blood might obtain eternal life for those who shed it even to the last drop. Here examine the dispositions of your heart, and consider who those are whom you find it so difficult to love. Are they false witnesses, who have led you from tribunal to tribunal ; hard-hearted persons who have given you vinegar and gall to drink ; blood-thirsty assassins who desired to nail you, like Jesus, to a cross ? Perhaps they are persons who have only looked at you coldly or unkindly, or who inadvertently said some thoughtless word which pained you. Surely you will not in future find it difficult to pardon a slight and unintentional offence, whereas Jesus so much loved His enemies as even to pray for His executioners.

Affections

Most loving Jesus ! How wonderful Thy love and charity which were proof against every outrage. Thou didst look with love and tenderness upon those who for so many years nourished in their hearts a more than diabolical hatred against Thee ; who cursed and blasphemed Thee as though Thou wert the greatest of malefactors ; who gloried in having so disfigured Thee that Thou wert scarcely recognisable ; who mocked and derided Thee in the midst of Thy cruel torments. Every feeling of their hearts was known to Thee, but this did not diminish Thy love for them. Thy meekness was unalterable—Thou didst not utter one word of complaint—nor didst Thou seek revenge—Thou didst love all—shed Thy precious Blood for all—and none were excluded from Thy Sacred Heart. Thy love, O Jesus, was strong and generous ! How does mine resemble Thine ? Mine does not even deserve

the name of love, for the slightest offence or injury suffices not only to cool, but even sometimes to extinguish it altogether, so totally devoid am I of charity. How dreadful the thought! I have been chosen by God amongst thousands to follow Jesus; I have voluntarily separated myself from the world, and chosen a crucified Spouse; I have for years daily meditated the example and virtues of Jesus Christ, who loved even his executioners, and still I am devoid of charity, and that too after having spent so many years in the Religious state, received so many lights, graces, and divine inspirations, and had so many opportunities of advancing in virtue. Oh, have I not reason to detest my coldness, ingratitude, and tepidity!

SECOND POINT

The love of Jesus for His enemies was a prodigy of love, considering the circumstances under which He loved them. Hitherto we have been considering the rage, hatred, and unexampled cruelty, exercised against Jesus by His enemies; let us now meditate, in the two following points, the extent of our divine and loving Redeemer's love for them.

1. The time in which Jesus prayed for His enemies. He spoke to many from the cross; He commended His Spirit into the hands of His Eternal Father; He confided His afflicted Mother to the care of His beloved disciple John; He exclaimed, "I thirst;" but for whom did He first speak? was it in favour of His disconsolate Mother, or His beloved disciple, or even of Himself? No; His first words were addressed to His Eternal Father on behalf of His enemies, for whom He implored pardon. "Father, forgive them, for they

know not what they do."—*Luke* xxiii. 34. Oh, what a miracle of love!

2. The persevering malice of His enemies, which increased, notwithstanding His ardent love for them. It would seem, humanly speaking, that our Blessed Redeemer ought not to have asked pardon for His enemies, until they had first acknowledged their crimes, and humbly implored pardon and mercy. But His charity was of a transcendent order: it could admit of no delay; it urged Him to become at once an intercessor with His Eternal Father for guilty man. "I love them," said Jesus, "and therefore do I intercede for them, even at this very moment when I am hated, insulted, and blasphemed by them. Though I feel all the effects of the rage and hatred of my enemies, I love them, I intercede for them, and I offer for their salvation my Blood to the last drop." What words can more fully express the extent of this excessive love?

3. Jesus in His prayer excused His enemies. It cannot be denied that the Jews were guilty of the most atrocious injustice in condemning Jesus to so cruel and ignominious a death. They had witnessed His miracles, and knew His innocent and sinless life, which had been attested by the pagan judge before whose tribunal He was arraigned. The accusations they falsely alleged against Him proved their malice. Notwithstanding Jesus prayed for them, and pleaded their ignorance as their excuse. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."—*Luke* xxiii. 34, as if He would have said, Father, I do not say that they have not sinned, but I say that their crime may be excused; they are grossly ignorant, otherwise they would never have treated me so barbarously. I there-

fore entreat Thee, my Father, by the love Thou dost bear Me, to love and pardon them. Oh, wonderful love of Jesus for His enemies, which caused Him thus to excuse their malice! Here we may learn from His example how we are bound to love those who may at any time injure or persecute us. What did Jesus see in His enemies that could have induced Him to love them? He saw in them a violent propensity to evil; He saw in them souls formed to His own image and likeness and destined to participate in His glory; He viewed in them the decree of His Eternal Father, who through their hands presented Him the bitter chalice prepared for Him; and finally, He looked upon them as instruments employed by the Divine Justice, to punish in Him the sins of guilty man, whose ransom He came to pay. These powerful motives urged Him to pray most ardently to His Eternal Father, to obtain pardon for his enemies.

Affections

Beloved Jesus! I now fully understand why I have always found so much difficulty in loving those who offended me. I never acted towards them as Thou didst towards Thy enemies. How perfect would my charity now be, and how closely would my heart resemble Thine, had I always considered those who offended or injured me, as Ministers of Thy Divine Justice, to punish me for my sins. Alas! I have been sadly wanting in charity! Divine Redeemer, I ought to be silent, and hide myself, were it possible, from Thy sight, for I am indeed unworthy to appear before Thee. But what will this avail? Is it not better for me to acknowledge my sins, and humbly ask pardon

for having offended Thee ? My Jesus, I have frequently meditated upon and admired Thy sublime example, but alas ! I have never yet had courage to reduce it to practice. Shall I always remain in my sins and imperfections ? No, most loving Jesus, with Thy grace I will endeavour to reform all the irregularities of my heart—to love my enemies—to suffer injuries with meekness and in silence—and after thy example to return good for evil. I cannot, however, do so, if my understanding be not enlightened, and my courage animated by supernatural motives. To Thee, my crucified and most loving Redeemer, I have recourse, I beseech Thee by the ineffable meekness whereby Thou didst pardon Thy enemies—by that affectionate prayer Thou didst offer to Thy Eternal Father in their behalf—and through the merits of Thy most Precious Blood which Thou didst shed for their salvation, to grant me a tender and universal charity—that charity which will enable me to bear all wrongs and trials—that charity which will ever incline me to return good for evil.—Amen.

THIRD MEDITATION

On the fruit to be drawn from the preceding Meditations

We have arrived at the most important point in spiritual life, and one upon which our progress in virtue mainly depends. We must of necessity walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, and faithfully imitate His example by bearing patiently interior trials, bodily labour, insults, contempt, calumny, and persecutions, from whatever quarter they may come. Whoever has

not the courage to walk in this path can never find God—still less can he hope to acquire perfect charity, which is the object of these spiritual exercises, and to the acquiring of which every action of our lives should tend. Consider, therefore, attentively the following truths, and resolve to walk generously in the path traced out for you by your crucified Redeemer, and to preserve therein as long as He shall please to ordain.

First truth.—*Interior trials raise the soul to a state the most sublime.* The only-begotten Son of God had two objects in view when He descended from heaven. First, to offer to His Eternal Father a sacrifice worthy of the infinite Majesty of God. Secondly, that man might have in Him a model of that perfect sanctity to which he is bound to aspire. How did Jesus act in order to accomplish this two-fold mission? From the first moment of His incarnation, until His last breath upon the cross, He led a life of sufferings. We must, therefore, conclude that a state of suffering is the most sublime in which man can be placed, or that Jesus Christ has not given to man an example of perfect sanctity.

Second truth.—*Interior trials are most beneficial to the soul.* It would not be easy to enumerate all the advantages to be found in suffering; we shall, therefore, confine ourselves to the consideration of two only. When God designs to unite a soul intimately to Himself, and to communicate to her the sweets of His holy love, He principally requires of her two things; namely, great purity of heart, and the practice of virtue in an eminent degree. Now the most effectual way to attain these two ends is by interior trials. It is certain that by means of interior trials purity of heart is acquired,

because those who are led by this way not being able to find any consolation but in God alone, and in the accomplishment of His adorable will, they learn gradually to disengage themselves from creatures, to despise every earthly consolation, and to turn with all the affection of their hearts to God, who is their Sovereign Good, and in whom alone is to be found all that can satisfy their desires. By this way also, the soul acquires the perfection of all the virtues, because being incapable of practising any act of virtue, without an extraordinary and heroic effort over the perverse inclinations of nature, the virtues themselves become more deeply rooted in the heart, and acquire greater lustre and perfection. Hence it is that those who pass through these interior trials are more speedily admitted to an intimate union and familiarity with God.

Third truth.—*Interior trials place the soul in a state the most secure.* There have been persons specially favoured by God with divine lights and heavenly consolations who seemed to have attained the summit of perfection, and to have led lives more angelic than human; but not being sufficiently grounded in the virtues, especially in that of humility, became vain of the graces bestowed upon them, and afterwards fell from the height of sanctity into the abyss of every vice and misery. Those, however, who are led through the path of interior trials and afflictions may be fearless of such dangers. Their state is always secure and beneficial to the soul. In it the most perfect virtues are acquired and practised, such as humility, submission, meekness, charity, and resignation to the Divine Will; in it also the soul is disposed to receive the choicest graces, and a solid foundation is laid for

the attainment of the most eminent sanctity. The soul in this state learns truly to imitate Jesus Christ and to pursue the path He has pointed out, both by word and example. It only now remains for you to consider by what practices you may learn to bear interior trials.

First practice.—You must imprint deeply on your mind, by frequent meditation, certain truths and maxims, which will fortify you while labouring under interior trials, such as the following. 1st, I should consider that were I to suffer all imaginable pains, even for a thousand years, they would be as nothing, compared with the happiness of possessing God. 2nd, I can never suffer as much as I deserve for my sins; and however great my sufferings may be, they can never equal the pains of hell, which I have deserved for my sins. These truths ought to be so frequently and attentively meditated upon, as to become familiar, and as it were present to the mind upon every trying occasion.

Second practice.—You should endeavour to bear trifling and daily contradictions in silence. By this means you will become courageous, and disposed to bear greater trials. In daily contradictions call to mind some of these maxims; offer your trials and sorrows to God with great purity of intention; make an act of ardent charity; observe strict silence; and utter not one word of complaint to anyone.

Third practice.—In severe and protracted trials or calamities make a generous sacrifice of yourself to God; every morning resign yourself to all the dispensations of His divine Providence in your regard, and renew this act of resignation frequently during

the day. Each hour of the day offer your trials and afflictions to God, and ask the assistance of His grace to bear them for His love. Never complain of your sufferings, whether they come immediately from God or through the instrumentality of His creatures. Make these acts with humility and filial confidence in God, and patiently await the time ordained by Him for your deliverance from your trials. These are eminent virtues, by the practice of which you will become true imitators of Jesus Christ, and dispose your souls for the most intimate union with God. If you feel yourself inspired to practise them, offer your resolutions to your crucified Saviour with great humility, by the following prayer :—

Jesus ! beloved Jesus ! what a spectacle do I behold hanging on the cross ! Infinite Beatitude, sorrowful even unto death ; Infinite Sanctity and Innocence condemned to be crucified ; Infinite Majesty nailed to the cross between two thieves ; Infinite Love become an object of hatred !—and all this for love of me !—For me Thou didst shed the last drop of Thy precious Blood from every vein in Thy sacred and innocent Body—for me Thy Sacred Wounds were opened ;—for me Thou didst subject Thyself to every torment—I believe all this, most suffering Jesus ! and still, oh, detestable coldness and indifference of my heart ! I do not yet love Thee ! Alas ! I know the fatal cause of this ; it is because I love myself too much, and am unwilling to suffer, or to do any violence to myself. My inordinate self-love is an impediment to my loving Thee. My soul, wilt thou always be ungrateful to thy most loving Jesus, and wilt thou not once for all resolve to die to thyself, and suffer some-

thing for the love of Him who was crucified for love of thee? My God, how shameful, should I refuse to do so! I have deserved to burn eternally in hell—and yet I will not submit to a slight inconvenience;—I have deserved to be a prey to eternal despair, and I will not patiently endure a passing interior desolation—I have deserved to be eternally accursed by all creatures, and I will not bear the slightest contempt—I have deserved to dwell eternally with demons and reprobate souls, and yet I will not tolerate the slightest defect in my neighbour. How disgraceful! How great is my ingratitude, beloved Jesus? Mayest Thou be for ever blessed, for having enlightened me on the sins of my past life. I call Heaven to witness the sorrow I now feel for my tepidity in Thy love and service, and the firm resolution I now make to walk in Thy footsteps during the remainder of my life. Beloved Jesus! strengthen me.

Eighth Day

To understand the end proposed in the meditations of this week, it would be necessary to understand also the order prescribed in the distribution of the Spiritual Exercises. In the meditations of the first day, you considered the end of your creation, which is to love and serve God perfectly in this life, and to enjoy Him eternally in the next. To attain this end, you generously resolved to make every sacrifice. But to succeed in this, you must be truly contrite for your sins, mortify your evil inclinations and aim at great purity of heart. All the meditations of the first week tended to this end. In the meditations of the second week, we pointed out to you the necessity and importance of modelling your life upon that of Jesus Christ, and of adorning your soul with the virtues He came on earth to teach us both by word and example. To encourage you to surmount all the difficulties attendant on the practice of virtue, and that you may learn to die to yourself, you meditated, during the third week, the Passion and Death of our Divine Redeemer. When you shall have succeeded in learning to die to yourself, you will have attained that high degree of the love of God, which is the end of your creation. During the fourth week, therefore, we shall meditate in what the perfection of this love consists. We will commence with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, that by meditating attentively on the eternal happiness which awaits you in heaven, you may learn to despise

all earthly things, to love sufferings and afflictions, and to renew the entire consecration of yourself to God, by which means you will dispose your soul for a more immediate and intimate union with Him.

FIRST MEDITATION

On the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

FIRST POINT

As the sufferings of Jesus Christ in His Passion were great beyond human conception, so was He transcendently glorious and triumphant in His Resurrection. The sufferings of Jesus Christ in His Passion arose principally from four causes. 1. From the excruciating torments inflicted on His Sacred Body. 2. From extreme mental agony. 3. From unheard-of contempt and outrages. 4. From the incredible malice of His enemies. Now consider the beatitudes which were the recompense of these sufferings.

1. *The resuscitated Body of Jesus assumed an incomparable beauty.* To form some idea of this beauty, imagine, in the first place, that you behold the heavens illumined by the glorified body of one of the saints. So great would be its brilliancy as to illuminate the whole world and eclipse the lustre of the meridian sun. Now, were God to unite in one body the beauty of all the saints, that union of beauty would fade away in the presence of the glorified Body of Jesus in His Resurrection, whose Sacred Humanity only three days before had been treated with so much cruelty and barbarity by His enemies, that it could only be likened unto the body of a leper.

2. *The soul of Jesus in His Resurrection overflowed with ineffable joy.* To understand this joy you must call to mind the mental agony which Jesus suffered in the Garden of Gethsemani. So great was His anguish, that had all men been made partakers thereof, it would have sufficed to cause their death. The joy which He felt at His Resurrection was likewise so great, that were all creatures capable of participating therein, they, also, would most assuredly have died of ineffable delight.

3. *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ tended infinitely to His honour and glory.* What a contrast! Jesus now constitutes the glory of the angels, who descend from heaven to grace the triumph of His Resurrection. He is now the joy of the patriarchs, who prostrate before Him to adore and magnify Him as their Redeemer. He is now the Judge of the living and the dead, and shall one day be adored in the Valley of Josaphat both by the saints and the reprobate. He is the crown of the elect, everyone of whom shall incessantly bless and glorify Him throughout eternity. —Yes; such is the glory of Jesus Christ in His Resurrection, of that same Jesus, who only three days before was derided by Herod as a fool, by the soldiers as a mock king, and treated by the Jews as the greatest of malefactors.

4. *Jesus in His Resurrection was the object of universal love.* Now, I do not allude to the love with which the angels were on that day inflamed for Jesus; nor to that with which the Fathers in Limbo plunged into His Sacred Heart, there to be inundated with the torrents of His delights; I allude only to that ardent love with which all the inhabitants of heaven are

now penetrated. There, throughout eternity, Jesus will be the unceasing object of their thoughts, nor will one instant elapse in which they will not bless Him, praise Him, and love Him with an ever-increasing love.

Affections

Thy sufferings, Divine Redeemer, are now ended. The day of glory has at length dawned for Thee, and so transcendent is the splendour of Thy Sacred Body, that it far surpasses that of the meridian sun. Thy Sacred Heart and Soul are immersed in an ocean of delights. Thy Holy Name is adored by angels and men. Thou art the joy of the elect. I rejoice in Thy glory and beatitude. Mayest Thou be eternally praised, blessed, adored, and glorified, together with Thy Eternal Father, for whose love Thou didst submit to so painful and ignominious a death. How happy shall I be, if, following Thy example, I shall one day arise to a glorious immortality! How ravishing the thought that I shall then behold in heaven the lovely countenance of Jesus, hear His loving voice, love Him and be beloved by Him, embrace Him, and be embraced by Him, always enjoy His society, and never again fear to be separated from Him, who should be the sole object of all my desires and affections!

SECOND POINT

This Meditation is calculated to give rise to many holy reflections and resolutions. After having seriously reflected on the glorious Resurrection of Jesus Christ, weigh attentively the following considerations, and apply them to the wants of your own soul.

First.—As Jesus Christ rose triumphantly from

the dead, so shall you also arise, if during the short period of life you faithfully imitate His example. " For, as the sufferings of Christ abound," says the Apostle, " so also through Christ does your consolation abound, knowing that He who raised up Jesus, will raise you up also with Jesus."—*I Cor.* vi. 14. " If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with Him." O consoling thought! O words capable of removing all sadness from the heart! With these very eyes I shall behold Jesus—with these very arms I shall embrace Jesus—with these ears I shall hear the melody of the celestial choirs—with this very mouth I shall taste and feed on the Bread of Angels—and with these self-same feet I shall one day move above the stars of the firmament.

Second.—As Jesus Christ rose triumphantly from the dead in virtue of His Cross and Passion, so it is certain that there is no better means to attain to a glorious immortality than by crosses and tribulations. This the Apostle tells us in the following words : " A faithful saying : for if we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with Him ; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Christ."—*II Tim.* ii. 11, 12. What will you then think of past trials and afflictions ? "O thrice blessed sufferings," you will exclaim, " which have purchased for me such and so high a degree of glory."

Third.—The more closely we resemble Jesus Christ in His sufferings, the more shall we be like unto Him in glory after the Resurrection. The Apostle of the Gentiles writing on this subject says, " As you are partakers of the sufferings of Christ, so shall you be also of His consolations."—*II Cor.* i. 7. Mark well these words of the Apostle. They are intended to impress upon our minds, that the more we shall suffer

with Christ on earth, the more we shall rejoice with him in heaven ; the greater our trials here, the greater shall be our glory hereafter. When the mind is once thoroughly convinced of these truths, contempt, interior desolation, sufferings and humiliations will appear to us as they really are ; the effects of the most loving and tender care of God in our regard—as the most efficacious means of acquiring sanctity—as the most precious gift which Jesus Christ, expiring on the cross, could bequeath unto us, and as the most certain pledge of a future and eternal glory. Yes ; this Jesus Christ Himself tells us. What blindness then would be ours were we to repine when tried by afflictions ! Ought we not rather with thanksgiving to extol the mercy of God, who so liberally bestows upon us His choicest gifts. Were all creatures to conspire against us, to injure, despise, and treat us with the most unheard-of cruelty, such a combination of calamities would be the very means intended by God to carry out His merciful designs in our regard—to aid us in the acquisition of eminent sanctity—to assimilate us more perfectly to Jesus Christ crucified, to increase our glory in heaven and to merit for us a brilliant and unfading crown for eternity. This Jesus Christ has taught us. Have we not hitherto considered these greatest of all blessings as real evils ? Blinded by self-love, I fear we have done so—and strayed from the path of sanctity by not following the example of Jesus Christ ?

Affections

Jesus lives ! Yes ; He is risen from the dead. He has entered into glory, and His sacred Body and Soul

now enjoy every delight. This I believe, because Jesus, who is Truth itself, has said it. I also steadfastly believe that I shall live eternally if I follow Jesus Christ. I shall rise from the dead and enter heaven. With my own eyes I shall behold my Redeemer; I believe this, because Jesus the Eternal Truth has said it. I shall receive the reward of all my sufferings. For a momentary trial I shall enjoy eternal beatitude—for a passing humiliation everlasting glory—for a transitory affliction never-ending joy. Jesus, the Infallible Truth, has said this. O holy Faith, how sublime Thy revelations, how consoling Thy promises!

But what sad truths does this same Faith unfold to my view! If, as I believe, it be true that for every act of mortification, self-denial, or patience; for every injury, affront, or humiliation endured with meekness and in peace; for every act of resignation in temptations and interior desolation, God will bestow upon me a special reward, a new crown of glory, a higher degree of beatitude; what graces must I not have forfeited by my impatience, self-love, pride, vanity, sloth, and cowardice. Why have I been so negligent? I have indeed reason to deplore my want of correspondence with divine grace, but I will not yield to diffidence—I can repair the past, for as Jesus Christ entered into glory, so shall I, if I be only faithful in imitating His example. Prostrate in Thy presence, Divine Jesus, I now firmly purpose, with the assistance of Thy grace, for the future to model my life on Thine.

SECOND MEDITATION

On the Love of God and our obligation to love Him on account of His infinite Goodness to us

We are bound to love God with our whole hearts, and that for two reasons. First.—Because He is infinitely good to us. Secondly.—Because He is infinitely good in Himself. The love of God to man will form the subject of the following meditation.

FIRST POINT

God merits our love, on account of the infinite love and goodness He has ever manifested to us. To fathom the abyss of this love and goodness, let us consider in detail, some of its properties. First.—God loved us with an eternal love. As God never had a beginning, but was always self-existent; so His love for us had no beginning, but is as ancient as Himself, that is from eternity. Now tell me what were you a thousand years ago?—Nothing. How was God then occupied?—In loving you as ardently as when He shed for your salvation the last drop of His precious blood upon the cross. Tell me again, what were you before the creation? Nothing. Neither the heavens nor the earth, nor angels, nor men existed, but God then loved you. For your sake He created heaven and earth; the latter to serve for your habitation during the short period of your mortal life: the former to be your home for a glorious eternity. Conceive, if you can, the eternal ages which preceded the creation, and tell me what then existed? Nothing but God alone, who was infinitely glorious and infinitely happy

in Himself. What was the occupation of God from eternity?—He was occupied in loving you—each moment He thought of you—He determined to die for you, and to make you for eternity a participator of his infinite riches and beatitude. What a prodigy of love and goodness!

Second.—God loves us with a generous and disinterested love. To be convinced of the infinite munificence of God in our regard, it is not necessary to call to mind one by one the many graces we have received. The stupendous mystery of the Incarnation alone should suffice to convince us of this. Let us suppose that one of the king's officers had stolen money to a large amount from the royal treasury, that having been convicted of the theft he was thrown into prison, there to drag out a miserable existence until he should have made entire restitution. Let us also suppose that a rich and powerful man, moved to compassion, sells out his property in order to liberate the prisoner and meet the demands of the king, after which, being reduced to extreme poverty, he has no alternative but to labour in order to gain his daily subsistence. Would not this be a prodigy of charity and benevolence? But who has performed such a miracle of love? Consider attentively, and you will easily discover who is the culprit here alluded to and who his merciful Redeemer.

Third.—God loves us with a constant and enduring love. Descend in spirit into the prison of hell, and you will there behold a spectacle such as is calculated to fill you with terror. There you will see numberless damned souls burning in unquenchable flames. Imagine that Jesus descends from heaven, delivers

one of these reprobate souls from hell, reunites her to the body, and allows her time for repentance. What would you say? Would you not conclude that the love of Jesus Christ for this soul must indeed be great, nay, even incomprehensible? Is it not certain that this soul has deserved hell as much and possibly more than the rest? Perhaps she was even more criminal than some who are left to suffer eternal torments, while she alone is liberated and allowed time for repentance. O how great and inconceivable must have been the love of Jesus Christ for this soul! In this privileged being do you not recognise yourself? Is it not true that there are in hell millions of souls who have not offended God as grievously as you—who have been more faithful in corresponding with divine grace, and less slothful and tepid than you? Still you have not only been preserved, but God has moreover lavished upon you His choicest and most abundant graces. To you, indeed, may be well applied the words of the Jews when they saw Jesus weep over Lazarus: "Behold, how He loved him."

Affections

Thou art admirable, O God! in all Thy works, but in none art Thou so much so as in Thy infinite love for man. Thou, the Supreme Being, who art without beginning or end, hast never ceased for one moment to love me with an eternal and most ardent love. What has Thou not suffered for love of me! Thou didst descend from heaven, assume the form of a helpless infant, wert born in a stable at Bethlehem, didst lead a life of toil and privations, earn Thy daily bread with the sweat of Thy brow, and finally, didst end

Thy days as a malefactor nailed to an infamous cross. Love alone could have induced Thee to undergo such hardships. Yes; Thou didst love me with the most enduring love. Notwithstanding the innumerable sins I have committed—the many graces I have abused—the many opportunities afforded me of being reconciled to Thee, which I have neglected—Thy merciful invitations which I have despised—still my unworthiness has never been able to cool or extinguish the ardour of Thy charity towards me. O most loving Redeemer, God infinitely loving, infinitely good, and infinitely merciful, how truly dost Thou deserve that I should love Thee with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, for thus it is I am bound to love Thee! I have been and am indeed a monster of ingratitude, in not having loved Thee, most loving God, with my whole heart. O most faithful Lover! my Lord, my God, my Father, my Friend, and my All! I acknowledge my base ingratitude and I heartily detest it. I have loved creatures and the fleeting goods of the earth, but I have not loved Thee, to whom alone I am indebted for every blessing I enjoy, and who died on the cross for love of me. Divine Lover of souls, I acknowledge my ingratitude. I now give Thee my heart—I give it to Thee irrevocably and for ever. Yes; I will love Thee henceforth, and I will endeavour to love Thee the more ardently in order to make some amends for the many years I have lived a stranger to Thy love.

SECOND POINT

God merits our love, on account of the eternal beatitude He has prepared for us in heaven. What, my soul, is God disposed to do for you? He wishes

to give Himself to you for eternity. Beg light to understand the greatness of this gift, this miracle of the infinite love of God for man, and endeavour now to consider attentively one of the most consoling of all the mysteries of our holy religion.

1. To possess God is to attain the completion of all our desires. The moment the soul is liberated from the body, she is illumined by a supernatural light, whereby she clearly understands that God is her only and Sovereign Good—her supreme and only happiness. To this light succeeds so impetuous a desire of enjoying this only and Sovereign Good—this supreme and only happiness, that the privation thereof constitutes in hell the greatest torment of the damned soul. Now, to satisfy the vehement ardour with which the soul thus tends to God, He unites her intimately to Himself, by engulfing her in the abyss of His Divinity. In an instant she feels an infinite satisfaction and is immersed in an ocean of ineffable delights.

2. To possess God is to love and contemplate Him for eternity. There will not be one moment throughout eternity in which the blessed soul will not see God, and discover the infinite treasures of His omnipotence, goodness, beauty, and other perfections, the sight and knowledge of which will throw her into an ecstasy of infinite delights. Nor will there be one moment in which she will not feel herself inflamed with an ever-increasing love for her Sovereign Good.

3. To possess God is to enjoy an infinite happiness. The just soul will partake in heaven of the same happiness which God Himself enjoys. By this you are to understand that you will participate in the same delights, pleasures, and happiness enjoyed by God

Himself. But who can conceive the extent of this happiness? Consider these stupendous and incontestable truths. Were one drop of that eternal felicity to be imparted to the damned souls, that drop alone would suffice to overwhelm them with such ineffable joy that they would in a moment forget the excruciating torments of hell from which they are now suffering. One ray of that eternal beatitude would also suffice to fill the souls of all the saints with inexpressible delight, and confer infinite happiness on all creatures, were they as countless as the grains of sand on the seashore. In a word, the happiness of heaven is so great and of such a nature, as to satisfy even God Himself, who is capable of an infinite enjoyment.

4. To possess God, is to be loved by Him with an infinite love. God regards the beatified soul as His cherished and beloved child, whom He wishes to enrich with all the treasures of His goodness, and as His spouse, who constitutes all His joy and delight. There is no tenderness of love comparable to that of the divine love; as the power of God is infinite it infinitely surpasses all human power—as His love is likewise infinite, it, too, infinitely surpasses the united love of all mankind. Yes, He alone can admit a soul into His Sacred Heart, and give her to drink of the torrent of His delights of which creatures are deprived, the bliss of which neither men nor angels can comprehend.

5. To possess God, is to enjoy for eternity the same beatitude which God Himself enjoys. The beatitude of God is eternal, uninterrupted, and incapable of being diminished. Your happiness will also possess these three qualities. First.—It shall be eternal.

As many ages shall pass away as there are grains of sand on the seashore, atoms in the air, drops of water in the ocean, and still no portion of your beatitude shall have passed away, because it will be eternal and without end. Second.—Your beatitude shall be uninterrupted, because, during every moment of eternity, you will discover new perfections in God. God, being infinitely beautiful, you will ever admire in Him an abyss of ever new and infinite loveliness; being infinitely good, you will discover in Him a new abyss of goodness heretofore unperceived, which will ever increase the flames of your love; being infinitely merciful, you will for ever taste and enjoy the torrent of His delights. Third.—Your beatitude will be without diminution. You will have, it is true, a most ardent and insatiable desire to enjoy God, but you will for ever have the full enjoyment of Him, and be always supremely happy in the possession of God.

Affections

My God, my Sovereign and only Good! How blind have I hitherto been! How can I ever repay such infinite love but by loving Thee with my whole heart? Yes, my God! from this moment I consecrate myself a willing victim to Thy love. I will joyfully make to Thee the sacrifice of every affection dearest to me. Teach me to love Thee with my whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. I renounce every desire and affection of which Thou art not the sole object. I desire to love Thee alone, my Sovereign Good, because Thou art infinitely good. Grant that I may love Thee during life, and prefer Thy honour, will, and pleasure to all that is most dear to me on earth.

Were I even to love Thee with the utmost perfection, what would my love be in comparison with Thy infinite love for me? A mere nothing. Would that I could love Thee, most faithful and amiable Lover of my soul, with the united love of all the angels and saints in heaven, that I might thus make some return for Thy infinite love. But of what avail are these, my desires, if Thou, who alone art worthy of infinite love, dost not enkindle in my heart a perfect love for Thee? O God of love, have pity on me. Exert Thy infinite Power in my behalf, for I have no other wish or desire than to love Thee with my whole heart.

THIRD MEDITATION

On the Love of God, and on our obligation to love Him on account of His infinite Perfections

FIRST POINT

God merits our love because He is infinitely good in Himself. This motive is the basis or foundation upon which the perfect love of God is to be raised. We are bound to love God, because He is infinitely good, and deserving on His own account of being infinitely loved by us. But what do the words *Infinitely Good* signify? They mean that God is a Being who possesses in and by Himself every perfection in an infinite degree. To form some idea of the infinite perfections of God let us consider some of them in detail.

1. God is infinitely Beautiful. Here we must make use of suppositions, which, however strong, can only be compared to the ideas of a child, who would endeavour to trace the course of the sun and the

other planets which shine in the firmament. First.—It is most certain that God has communicated to the Blessed Virgin a more clear and intuitive knowledge of His infinite beauty than He has to all the angels and saints together. Now let us suppose that at this moment God enlightens her understanding, and imparts to her a knowledge of His infinite beauty, far surpassing that which she has hitherto received; and that for every moment, during millions of years, He communicates to her ever-increasing lights on this divine attribute. Would she, at the close of so long a period, be able to understand the extent of the beauty of God? No. After the lapse of so many ages spent in contemplating His infinite beauty, as much more would still remain to be seen as there would remain water in the ocean after one drop would have been drawn from its immensity. Second.—The angels in heaven are innumerable, the least of whom is endowed with such surpassing beauty that no mortal could behold him without dying of joy. Let us suppose that God were to create an angel in whom would be combined the united beauty of all the angels. How lovely would he not be! Nevertheless, the beauty of this angel could be nothing compared with that of God. Were He also, every moment during the space of a thousand years, to create a million of angels, each as superior to the other in beauty as the highest seraph is to a man, and after the lapse of these thousand years, again, by His divine fiat, to create *one* angel in whom the beauty of all the preceding angels would be concentrated; could the mind of man conceive anything more beautiful than such a combination of charms? Yet, compared with the infinite beauty of God, that of this

angel would be as nothing, nay, it would be even deformity. Now, our suppositions might be endless, and still we could never imagine any beauty, how transcendent soever, which would not be infinitely surpassed by the infinite beauty of God.

2. God is infinitely Powerful. Here again we must have recourse to suppositions in order to form some idea of the perfections of God. First, let us suppose that the number of human beings who have lived and shall live on earth till the day of judgment, amount to two hundred thousand millions. What a prodigious number of souls! Of these men the souls of some will be in heaven; others either in purgatory or in hell, and the bodies of all shall have been reduced to dust. The Last Day arrives, the angel sounds his trumpet, which is heard throughout the universe, and what is the result? In the twinkling of an eye, at the words, "Arise, ye dead," all these bodies shall be reunited to their souls. What a stupendous effect of Divine Omnipotence! Imagine again, that God, descending from heaven, stands on the sea-shore, and says, "Let as many men appear here before Me as there are grains of sand on this shore." At these words, uttered by the Omnipotent God, myriads of human beings would in one moment start into existence. Multiply these suppositions to infinity, and never, during the whole course of your life, how long soever it may be, would you be able to form even the slightest idea of the ineffable power of God.

3. God is infinitely Good. The infinite Goodness of God is manifested by its effects. The first effect of God's infinite Goodness is His patience in bearing with sinners. God beholds from heaven numbers of

His creatures, who, enslaved to their irregular passions, indulge in every vice—daily offend Him—contemn His holy law—and blaspheme His Sacred Name. They live in the commission of every crime for twenty—thirty—forty—nay, and even for many more years. God sees them—He could in one moment annihilate them, and thus avenge the outrages they commit against Him. But no, He is silent, as though their iniquities were hidden from Him; He even prolongs their lives, and, as if they faithfully served Him, bestows daily new benefits upon them; He speaks to their hearts, and as earnestly invites them to return to Him, as if He had rather need of them, than they of Him.

The second effect of the infinite Goodness of God is the love with which He receives the repentant sinner. Imagine the case of a man who for a hundred years has lived in the commission of habitual mortal sin, and who never during the whole course of his life even thought of doing the least penance for his sins. Were this wretched man at the point of death, with only one moment to live, do you think God would pardon his many crimes? Here let us admire the infinite Goodness of God, for it is certain, that if this sinner were to make one interior act of true contrition, God would not only pardon him, and forget his past iniquities, but He would, moreover, make him partaker of His glory.

The third effect of the infinite goodness of God is the munificence with which he rewards the just. Let us again suppose the case of a man who spent his entire life in total forgetfulness of God, and never practised any act of virtue except the following act of

the love of God, made with a truly contrite and humble heart: "O my God, I love Thee above all things, because Thou art infinitely good." If after this one act, without any other merit on his part, he were to die, what reward do you think he would receive from God? Nothing less than the possession of heaven, and the vision and enjoyment of His own infinite Beauty, and that for eternity. Such is the admirable and infinite goodness of God in rewarding His elect.

Affections

Faith teaches me that Thou, my God, art infinitely good and perfect, and infinitely deserving of all my love. But how is it, that knowing and believing that I have been created for no other end than to love Thee here, and possess Thee eternally in heaven, my heart is so cold, insensible, and indifferent? I feel no pleasure in conversing with Thee; silence, solitude, and recollection are burdensome to me. My heart is devoid of love. My God! I know my misery, but unless Thou wilt deign to inflame my heart with the fire of Thy divine love, it must ever remain cold and insensible. Give me grace to begin from this moment to love Thee, who art infinitely good, and bestow upon me also the gift of final perseverance in Thy holy love.

When will the happy day come when I shall begin truly to love Thee? When I shall have learned to die to myself and all creatures, God will take possession of my heart, and inflame it with the fire of His holy love. From this moment I will endeavour to die to myself. I give Thee my heart. I am heartily sorry for having hitherto lavished my affections upon creatures, and for every action of my past life which

has not been performed exclusively for love of Thee. Henceforth Thy love alone and the accomplishment of Thy holy will shall be the object of all my thoughts, the centre of all my desires, and the end of all my actions. How sincere soever my resolutions may be, I feel conscious that, without Thy grace, I can never keep them. Cast upon me a look of compassion; remember, I beseech Thee, most loving Jesus, that Thou didst shed the last drop of Thy most precious blood, to wash away my guilt, and to gain my love. Through the merits of this same adorable blood, deign to work in me one of those miracles of Thy mercy by which Thou wilt destroy in my heart every earthly affection, and inflame it with the fire of Thy divine love.

SECOND POINT

God merits our love, because He is infinitely good. This is a most important truth, and if seriously considered will infallibly draw the heart to God.

1. Consider that whatever good exists in any creature on earth or in heaven proceeds purely from God. Look around, and see all the creatures which the earth contains. What a beautiful variety of trees, fruits, flowers, and other plants; of beasts, birds in the air, and fishes in the sea. From the earth raise your eyes to the heavens, and contemplate the wonders there displayed; behold the sun which illumines and vivifies the world, the stars which shine in the firmament; the incomprehensible extent and beauty of the heavens, above which is the habitation of the elect. From irrational creatures pass on to the consideration of intelligent beings, and consider the talents, beauty, wisdom, knowledge, love, benevolence, and all the

other natural and supernatural gifts bestowed on man; consider the angels and saints, their virtues, merits, sanctity, rewards, prerogatives, and glory, and now tell me where were all these noble creatures before the world was created? Faith teaches us that they were nothing, and would have remained in their nothingness, had not the infinite Goodness and Omnipotence of God called them into existence. God is, therefore, the sole author of their being and of their beauty.

2. Whatever good creatures possess, God, in His infinite Mercy, has communicated to them. All the beauty and sanctity which we admire in creatures is but an emanation of the infinite Beauty and Holiness of God. God alone is Good, and whatever good creatures possess is derived from His infinite Goodness. This is an article of Faith. Do you, in practice, profess it to be your belief? Alas! how badly do we employ the noblest affections of our hearts! Consider well the necessary consequences arising from these stupendous truths, and engrave them deeply on your memory. First.—As all that is good and excellent merits our love, God, who is in Himself infinitely good and perfect, deserves that we should love Him, if possible, with an infinite love. Second.—If God is infinitely good, we do not then love Him as we ought, unless we love Him to the utmost of our power. Third.—We do not fulfil our obligation of loving God with our whole strength, if we admit into our hearts any affection not directed to Him, if we do anything contrary to His holy law, if we even once oppose the merciful designs of His Providence in our regard.

Affections

I am not ignorant, my God, my Sovereign and only Good, of my obligation to love Thee, or of the characteristics of true love. A soul inflamed with love for Thee subdues every affection and every inclination which does not proceed from, and return to Thee; all her actions are performed with a view to please Thee and accomplish Thy holy will; in all her sufferings she is perfectly resigned, and abandons herself with the most unbounded confidence to Thy most loving Providence. What a happy state! Holy love, how desirable art Thou! Dost Thou dwell in my heart? During how many hours of my life have I loved God as I am bound to love Him? What works have I performed, what trials have I endured for love of Thee? Who will give a fountain of tears to my eyes, that I may bewail the time in which I did not love God, nor labour for His love?

I will not, however, despond. By fervour I can yet make atonement for the past—I will therefore banish all fear. "Cannot I do what so many persons of every age, sex, and condition have already done?" "I can do all things," says the Apostle, "in Him who strengthens me." With the same confidence I now say, my God, my strength, and my all, I will begin to love Thee, and to devote myself entirely to Thy guidance. "Receive, then, O Lord, my liberty, accept my memory, understanding, and will; all that I have or possess is Thy gift. To Thee I now restore all, and to Thy Will I deliver myself up to be governed. Give me but Thy love and Thy grace; with these alone I am rich enough, nor will I ask of Thee anything more."

Come, then, O Holy spirit! Thou art infinite love.

and the source of that divine fire which inflames the hearts of all the saints. Thou art infinite sanctity, and the fountain of those efficacious graces which penetrate the hearts of men, and draw them with all their affections entirely to God. Deign to come into my heart, to purify it from all its imperfections, and to enkindle in it the fire of Thy divine love. I am ready to do and suffer whatever Thou shalt please to ordain; dispose of me as Thou wilt, I am perfectly satisfied. The only favour I ask is Thy love; may it be the mainspring of my actions.

EXAMENS

Or, Considerations on the actual State of a Soul that tends to Perfection, and on the Practical Method of attaining it

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

We may reasonably suppose, that those who have voluntarily embraced the Religious state, have not done so for the purpose of immuring themselves in a convent, or merely with a view to serve God and save their souls by ordinary means. The former supposition would be folly, and the latter unpardonable imprudence, for they might, even in the world, have led Christian lives, and secured their salvation, without taking upon themselves the obligations of the religious state. Hence, it is evident, that those who have renounced the world and consecrated themselves to God must have been actuated by nobler motives, and that not content with ordinary virtue, they were impelled to enter the cloister, in the hope of there finding the means of attaining to eminent sanctity. This supposition being once admitted, we will propose the following Examens for your consideration, in making which, two things principally are required, that you may derive benefit from them.

First.—The Religious should seriously examine her heart in the presence of God; she must search into its most secret recesses and endeavour to discover all her imperfections, and her hidden and evil inclinations, nor should she be satisfied until she shall have succeeded in knowing the true state of her soul.

Second.—After having acquired this self-knowledge, she should resolve generously to go forward with the work of her perfection, and so regulate her life in future,

that she may reasonably hope ultimately to attain sanctity, which should be the great object of her desires. Both these objects will be attained by these Examens, which should be made after the meditations on the Purgative, Illuminative, and Unitive states. That these may be made with profit to the soul, the following directions should be followed in making the Examens. We will begin with those on the purgative state.

1. At the time appointed for this Examen, place yourself in the presence of God. Offer to Him, with the utmost purity of intention, the action you are about to perform, humbly beg light to know the true state of your soul, and grace to correct all your defects.

2. Sit down before your crucifix, and read leisurely and attentively each point of the Examen.

3. Dwell on each point, and, in the presence of God, seriously and impartially consider the dispositions of your soul with regard to it.

4. Having acquired this knowledge, at the end of each Examen note down whatever faults you may have discovered, and proceed in like manner on the other points of your Examen.

5. Finally, make an act of contrition, and beg grace and pardon of the Eternal Father through the merits of the most precious Blood of His Divine Son.

When all the Examens on the Purgative state are made with that serious reflection which they require, take the paper on which you noted down all your defects, and, in the presence of God, read them attentively. By this review you will clearly, and without difficulty, discover the depravity of your heart, your many and deep-rooted passions, your

predominant passion, the virtues you have acquired, your advancement in the love of God and your neighbour; in a word, you will become thoroughly enlightened on the state of your soul. You must, moreover, make an humble and sincere manifestation of these defects, either verbally or in writing, to your confessor or spiritual director, that he may be able to form a correct judgment of the designs of God with regard to your soul and guide you more securely in the path of perfection.

The advantages arising to the soul from these two practices are almost incredible, with reference both to the past and future; as the knowledge of the actual state of the soul is one of the best and most necessary dispositions for a thorough reformation of life. To animate you still more to fidelity in these practices I shall here point out some of the advantages resulting from self-knowledge. It is utterly impossible to make a serious and careful Examen of our sins, imperfections, evil inclinations and passions, of our abuse of divine grace and our negligence and tepidity in the practice of virtue, without being filled with shame and confusion, lamenting our ingratitude to God, and being penetrated with the most lively sentiments of sorrow and detestation for the sins of our past lives. The sad recollection of so many sins and infidelities must move the heart to sorrow, excite in it the desire of amendment, and induce us to adopt the means best calculated to reconcile our souls with God, namely, the sincere and humble avowal of the sins of our whole lives. If these dispositions be accompanied by the special and abundant graces which God never fails to bestow on those who perform the Spiritual Exercises

with fervour, the happiest results may be hoped for. By these means the soul will obtain the remission of past sins, receive new light for the regulation of her conduct, and leave her retreat in the holiest dispositions.

Let the soul enter seriously into herself. Let her neither flatter nor deceive herself, but examine everything as exactly and rigorously as if she had to judge not herself, but her greatest enemy. Let her view all her defects impartially, that she may not only detest them, but be penetrated with a sincere sorrow for them, and a holy hatred and contempt for herself. A hasty and superficial Examen excites neither sorrow for past sins, nor desire of amendment; whereas, that which is seriously and carefully made cannot fail to produce a total reformation of life.

What has been said regarding the importance of the Examen may be applied also to the candid manifestation of the state of the soul to the confessor or spiritual director. This may be considered one of the most essential points in spiritual or religious life for the advancement of the soul in virtue. However experienced or learned a director may be, he may be deceived in the guidance of a soul who does not with candour and simplicity disclose to him her interior dispositions, and this, not for want of ability on his part, but because God, to punish the soul for her insincerity, withholds from him those lights which are necessary for her spiritual guidance: whereas, if she act with candour and simplicity, God will never permit her to be deceived, in reward of that sincerity and humility which led her, not to trust in her own lights, but to disclose to her director the most intimate feelings of her heart.

Here, however, you must carefully guard against a snare into which some persons not unfrequently fall during the time of Retreat. On examining the state of their souls, and seeing the multitude of their sins, their evil inclinations, and abuse of grace, they lose courage and yield to despondency. Thus they change the remedy into poison, and a great blessing into the greatest of evils. Self-knowledge is a special grace from God, and the strongest incentive to reformation of life. Hence, while the soul ought to excite in herself a true sorrow and repentance for past sins, with a holy hatred and contempt for self, she ought, at the same time, to begin the work of her conversion with courage and fervour, and with confidence in the Goodness and Mercy of God proportioned to the extent of her spiritual misery. You can never begin the work of your sanctification too late, provided your heart be sincere; where the will is resolute and courageous you will surmount every difficulty. God is infinitely powerful, and can strengthen the weak; He is infinitely Good, and never denies His grace to those who confide in Him; He is infinitely Merciful, and forgets the past when the sinner is sincerely desirous to amend. Such is the idea you should form to yourself of the infinite Goodness of God; beware, therefore, of yielding to distrust in His infinite Mercy, which would not only be an injury done to God, but would be one of the greatest obstacles to your advancement in perfection.

Having concluded the Examens on the Purgative state, and seen the exact state of your soul, detested and lamented whatever in you was displeasing to God, you must now pass to those of the Illuminative and Unitive states. In these you will learn how to

regulate your future life if you be sincerely desirous to attain perfection. These Examens are to be made in the following manner.

1. At the appointed hour kneel down, place yourself in the presence of God, offer to Him with great purity of intention the exercise you are about to perform, and humbly beg grace to understand and practise the virtues taught you in these Examens.

2. Sit down, place your crucifix before you, and read slowly and attentively each point of the Examens.

3. Dwell on each point, and in the presence of God, seriously examine if you are sincerely determined to practise the virtues it inculcates.

4. Having done this, kneel down, offer to God the resolutions you have made, and beg grace to keep them through the merits of the most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.

At the close of these Examens, endeavour to impress upon your mind the following undoubted, though terrible truth. Although the Goodness, Mercy, and Liberality of God are infinite, they are not always so in their external effects. In these He observes some determined limits, according to the decrees of His infinite Wisdom and the dispensations of His adorable Will, in consequence of which He bestows on the soul such graces as are necessary to attain perfection, but these graces have also certain limits ; He gives her means and time, but only to a certain extent and period. If she do not co-operate with these graces, He withdraws from her and abandons her to her tepidity, not that she may be lost, but because He considers her unworthy of being raised by Him to a higher degree of sanctity. Hence proceed darkness in the

understanding, perversity in the will, desolation of soul during life, at death doubts and fears, and in purgatory intense sufferings for unexpiated offences.

Perhaps during these Spiritual Exercises your measure of grace may be filled up ; perhaps, too, this Retreat may be the last means afforded you by God to attain the great end of your creation, since we know not the day nor the hour when it may please God to summon any one of us out of life. All this is possible ! O God, Thy multiplied mercies should overwhelm all with holy fear, and enkindle in the hearts of all an ardent desire for their sanctification, especially during the holy time of Retreat, which is a time of grace, that following the counsel of the Apostle, who says, " let us labour while we have time," you may by fidelity become intimately united to God.

EXAMENS

ON THE PURGATIVE STATE

First Day

On Purity of Heart

THAT great master of spiritual life, St. Francis de Sales, speaking of purity of heart, says—In the first place, the soul must be free, not only from mortal, but even from venial sin. This is the first step to attain purity of heart. In the second place, the heart must be perfectly disengaged from all attachment to venial sin. Let us now consider attentively this truth, and examine the different degrees which lead to purity of heart, that you may be able to judge what progress you have made in this virtue.

On the Means of acquiring Purity of Heart

FIRST DEGREE

Supposing the soul to be already free from the guilt of mortal sin; then the first thing necessary for the attainment of purity of heart, is to abstain from the commission of those deliberate venial sins, which, of their own nature, or from the evil propensities of the human heart, lead to mortal sin. These venial sins are those which we commit with full consent or deliberation, regardless of remorse of conscience and the offence given to God; such, for example,

as to indulge in any inordinate affection—to entertain feelings of dislike for the neighbour—to yield to curiosity—and to expose ourselves to the proximate occasions of sinning against the virtues of purity or charity. The soul cannot long remain in this state. If she endeavour to avoid these venial sins, she will by degrees acquire purity of heart; but if she make little account of them, she will most assuredly fall into mortal sin.

These venial sins cannot be excused, much less extolled as virtues. There are some persons, no doubt, who confound evil with good, and vice with virtue, and who say there is no harm in mentioning to a friend the slight failings of a neighbour, and to advise him to be on his guard with such or such a person—they consider it prudence to assume a tone of authority, and to usurp a position, either in society or in a community, to which they are not entitled—they call it zeal for regular observance to speak of the disorders or irregularities of the community—to censure the conduct of superiors, and to criticise their regulations—they amuse themselves in listening to the murmurs and complaints of others about things of daily occurrence, and instead of checking, they even encourage such conversations, etc. Persons subject to these or similar defects, are either greatly deluded or highly criminal. They either know, or do not know, that they sin by such acts. If they sin through ignorance, their blindness is so great that they can never attain to union with God; but if they are conscious that they commit sin, and notwithstanding persevere in it, great indeed must be their malice, for they pretend to extol as virtue that which their conscience tells them is vice.

SECOND DEGREE

Those who have arrived at the second degree of purity of heart, though not free from irregular passions, nevertheless labour to mortify and subdue them. They are very unlike those who allow themselves to be carried away by their passions, who never sincerely detest them before God, or endeavour to eradicate them from their hearts, and are, therefore, incapable of ever acquiring even a mediocrity of virtue.

THIRD DEGREE

To this degree of purity of heart those persons have attained who, having mortified their passions and evil inclinations, make every effort in their power to correct those bad habits which lead even to venial sin. Such, for example, as the following. 1. To introduce frequently in conversation the sayings and doings of others, to misinterpret them without sufficient cause, or censure them, and thereby offend against Christian charity. 2. To complain of every trifle—to yield to impatience in adversity—and to manifest this impatience by some hasty or petulant words. 3. To perform spiritual exercises with tepidity, and make no effort to resist voluntary distractions in the performance of them. 4. To yield to depression of spirits or discouragement when things do not succeed according to our wishes, and other similar faults. Many devout souls are subject to these defects, and though they frequently confess them, still they do not amend, because their sorrow is superficial. To this cause may be attributed the subtraction of divine grace during the time of prayer and meditation; aridity in the performance of spiritual duties; difficulty in the practice

of interior recollection and exercise of the presence of God, and the absence of those choice graces which descend so copiously on those who are truly pure of heart. One habitual defect, if not corrected, is sure to estrange the soul from God, to cripple its energies, to dry up the channels of divine grace, and thus to lead insensibly to grievous transgressions.

FOURTH DEGREE

To this degree of purity of heart those souls have attained who would willingly sacrifice their lives rather than offend God, even by the least deliberate venial sin. They protest to God that they desire to be faithful to Him, and beg grace to be preserved from offending Him, but as they do not sufficiently mortify their passions and evil inclinations, and as the influx of divine grace into their souls is not as abundant or continuous as is necessary for the attainment of eminent perfection, it happens that scarcely a week passes in which they do not once or twice fail in their good resolutions, and commit some venial sin. Their state, however, is far better than that of those already mentioned, though they are not as yet in the immediate dispositions required for attaining the perfect love of God.

FIFTH DEGREE

To this degree of purity of heart those souls have attained who are sincerely disposed to suffer everything, nay, even death itself, rather than offend God by the least deliberate venial sin, and who persevere steadfastly in this determination. Such were the dispositions of the seraphic Catherine of Genoa, who

frequently said to her heavenly Spouse, "I would rather have my body cut into pieces than offend Thee by the least sin." You may judge by the two following marks, whether you have attained this degree of purity of heart. 1. If one, three, or six months elapse without your being conscious of having committed a deliberate venial sin. 2. If, after that lapse of time, falling into some slight fault, you feel as much sorrow as if you had committed a grievous mortal sin. A soul in such dispositions has already attained to an intimate union with God.

SIXTH, AND LAST DEGREE

To this degree of purity of heart those happy souls have attained, who never commit a deliberate venial sin, or who rarely do so, and then only through surprise, and without full advertence. There are, certainly, some such souls to be found, who have acquired this admirable purity of heart, by means of continual mortification and the special assistance of divine grace. The continual recollection of the presence of God banishes from their minds every idle thought; dead to themselves and to their passions, they are ever ready to repress even the first movements of them; so sincere and universal is their charity, that they are incapable of injuring any one in word or deed; in conversation, so great is their reserve, that a word of disedification never falls from their lips; thus advancing daily in virtue, they preserve that purity of heart which may be termed rather heavenly than terrestrial.

The Venerable Father Nicholas Lancisius was of this number. In a written manifestation of his conscience

to his Superior, he states : 1. That for many years no suspicious, idle, angry, or other sinful thought had entered his mind. 2. That for forty years he had never violated the rule of silence. 3. That during the same number of years, he had never experienced any feeling of inordinate love, or temptation against purity. 4. That he was free from every thought of vain-glory, and desire of esteem. 5. That he felt a sincere and tender love for his neighbour. 6. That he never felt conscious even of the first feeling of anger against those who persecuted him, but that on the contrary, he felt for them a sincere charity and ardent desire to do them all the good in his power. 7. For forty-eight years he had never felt any aridity in prayer, and his devotion was always so inflamed as to impart warmth to his body. Such was the admirable purity of heart to which his holy soul attained. Examine now what degree of this virtue you have acquired, and, believe me, this is one of the most important points in spiritual life. However multiplied your exercises of piety may be, they will never lead you to God, unless you have acquired perfect purity of heart.

Second Day

EXAMEN

On the Predominant Passions

As it is impossible to attain to union with God without Purity of heart, so it is likewise impossible to acquire Purity of heart without the perfect mortification of the Passions. One unmortified predominant evil inclination would suffice to defile the soul with many venial sins, and render her unworthy of intimate union with God. We will commence with the passion of inordinate Love, upon which it would be well to examine carefully the state of your soul.

On Inordinate Love

According to St. Francis de Sales, there are three kinds of love; natural, supernatural, and sinful. Natural love is the affection we feel for those who are endowed with certain fine qualities and talents, which attract our esteem and admiration, such as sweetness of temper, sincerity, readiness to oblige, and such like. This love cannot be called either good or bad, virtue or vice, only inasmuch as it is dignified by exalted motives, which make it meritorious, or debased by evil motives, which would render it sinful. Supernatural love is that by which we love the creature in and for God, and because we look upon him as the child of God, who desires that we should love our neighbour for His sake. This love is holy, and the result of

great virtue. Sinful love is that which inclines us to form an inordinate attachment for any unlawful or criminal purpose. This Love shall form the subject of our present Examen.

Characteristics of Inordinate Love

1. Inordinate love withdraws the heart from God, and attaches it to the creature. The Religious who would deliberately nourish such a passion would seriously injure her own soul. A violent attraction draws her heart to the creature, while a spiritual insensibility removes it far from God. In this state she will think with pleasure on the object of her affections—delight in conversing with her—grieve when separated from her—and rejoice in her society ; she will no longer feel any desire to converse with God ; she will find great difficulty in the recollection of His divine presence ; thoughts of the person to whom she is so devotedly attached will distract her at prayer ; and interior recollection will either be entirely neglected, or will have become distasteful. Hence, it is evident that God will no longer dwell in this divided heart, which prefers the creature to Him.

2. Inordinate Love defiles the heart with many venial sins, and also predisposes it for the commission of mortal sin. How many sinful thoughts, desires, and guilty imaginations, are entertained with complacency in the hearts and minds of those who are under the influence of this passion ! It is the fatal and fruitful source of innumerable idle and inconsiderate words, murmurs, jealousies, anger, flattery, hatred, and calumny. What feelings of contempt, rancour, ill-will, and animosities, follow ! Such are

the flowers and fruits of this accursed tree of inordinate Love.

3. Inordinate Love destroys, in a great measure, the fruit to be derived from Holy Communion. Conscience distinctly tells us that such an affection is displeasing to God, but as the soul loves her chains, she has no desire to break them, or shake off the bonds which fetter her. She may occasionally resolve to amend, but as her resolutions are neither strong nor sincere, they are consequently inefficacious. In these dispositions she receives the Holy Communion, but the chaste Lamb of God cannot unite Himself to such an unclean heart, nor will He impart to it His heavenly benedictions.

4. Inordinate Love exposes a Religious to the danger of losing the grace of God. It is as impossible to entertain inordinate Love deliberately in the heart for any length of time, without committing mortal sin, as it would be to keep a serpent in our bosom and escape being bitten. The reason is obvious, both on account of the nature of this passion, which excites violent temptations, and also on account of the subtraction of divine grace, to the danger of which the soul exposes herself, for God will not give His assistance to those who love the danger, and persevere in exposing themselves to it, notwithstanding His divine inspirations.

On the means of subduing Inordinate Love

1. The heart should be kept free and disengaged from all inordinate Love. A Religious should never entertain too tender or sensible an affection for any creature, nor be inordinately attached to any one.

Her heart should be so disengaged, that nothing could withdraw it from God, or distract her during the time of prayer.

2. The Religious should so purify and moderate her affection for creatures, that the love of God alone should reign sovereignly in her heart. She may love creatures, and love them even tenderly, but the love of God should ever hold the ascendancy over every other love. Hence, she should be ready and willing to sacrifice the friendship of those she loves, and even be satisfied to incur their displeasure, rather than violate for their sake, one single rule, neglect one injunction of obedience, or be guilty of the least imperfection; she should even be disposed to relinquish every friendship and intimacy during the whole of her life, should God call upon her to make such a sacrifice. Such were the dispositions of St. Augustine and St. Jane Frances de Chantal. Both wept bitterly for the loss of those they loved, the former for the death of his mother, St. Monica—the latter for the death of her holy father, St. Francis de Sales; but neither St. Augustine nor St. Jane Frances would have restored to life the beloved departed, had it been in their power, because they knew God had decreed their deaths, and they would not for any earthly consideration oppose His adorable Will. Those who aspire to union with God must endeavour to attain this degree of perfection.

3. The Religious should love, and consider God alone in those she loves. This high degree of divine love is usually the effect of the closest union with God. The soul which has attained this degree is so enlightened, that she views and loves God alone in all creatures, and all creatures in God. If she has to treat with

those who are endowed with many natural and supernatural gifts, she considers God in them, she sees how He dwells in them, and how the divine Goodness imparts to them the plenitude of His graces; to Him, therefore, she turns her heart, and she loves, esteems, and praises Him alone in His creatures. Whatever good she receives, she refers it entirely to God, whom she views in the person of her benefactors. According to St. Francis de Sales, this love is very rarely to be met with amongst men, who when they receive benefits think not of God, the Giver of all good gifts, or if they do, it is only as it were in a secondary point of view, as they make more account of creatures, or at least manifest more gratitude to them, than to God. Thus, very few persons love their neighbour from supernatural motives; because very few love God alone in their neighbour, and their neighbour solely in God.

Third Day

EXAMEN

On Ambition

We have now to undertake the conquest of an almost invincible enemy, which very few, even amongst Religious, have sufficient courage or greatness of soul to encounter, for it generally has full sway over the heart in which it predominates. It is only great and courageous souls who undertake to banish this foe, and to substitute in its place the virtue of humility. The desire of honour, celebrity, and esteem is so deeply rooted in the human heart, and so very pleasing and flattering to self-love, that the soul cannot be purified from these defects without persevering efforts and doing extreme violence to nature. Those who are not very courageous will in vain undertake this difficult task. How have you hitherto combated this passion, which is one of the most formidable enemies of the soul? What victories have you gained over it?

Characteristics of Ambition

1. The distinctive characteristic of this fatal passion is a great esteem for self, and as little regard for others. Those in whom it predominates are puffed up with the idea that their talents, address, prudence, virtues, and other acquirements, entitle them to general esteem; that they are qualified for everything; and they consider themselves injured if not entrusted

with the most important affairs. They can see none of these capabilities in others—have always some fault to find with everyone—and are ever ready to criticise their neighbour. Such Religious are odious and detestable in the sight of God.

2. The second characteristic of ambition is to seek and desire the praise and esteem of creatures. The Religious who is tainted with this vice, desires that all should have the same good opinion of her she has of herself. The sins which arise from this passion are innumerable. Amongst many others are the following: An inordinate desire of being praised, in which all her happiness consists; an insatiable anxiety to be preferred to others, and an extreme annoyance and dissatisfaction when others are preferred to her; a secret joy and gratification when any of the Sisters are reproved and humbled, vexation and disappointment when they are praised or esteemed. Besides many other sins of commission and omission into which she falls in consequence of this passion, she is also subject to jealousy, anger, disobedience, complaints, murmurs, and other similar faults.

3. The third characteristic of ambition is to fear and avoid humiliation, or to bear it with impatience and vexation. The slightest humiliation suffices to exasperate an ambitious soul; an injunction of obedience, which seems to make little of her, a reproof, an admonition, a refusal, a suspicion, even a look or a jest, is sufficient to embitter and disturb her peace of mind. Hence, her predominant passion is easily known. St. Francis de Sales says, "It is clear that those who yield to depression, when assailed by evil reports and calumny, are slaves to pride and self-love; for after all,

what are words, which vanish like smoke? I always regret to hear that any one is offended by an injurious word. There is a great difference between the humming and the sting of a bee, yet some persons are alarmed even at the buzz of a fly, to which such annoyances may be justly likened."

4. The fourth characteristic of ambition is to grieve excessively when despised or offended. We may meet with many things which are very disagreeable to nature, such, for example, as a false accusation or suspicion—a calumny or detraction—a public mortification—and other such humiliations. If on these occasions we grieve immoderately and break forth into complaints, it is evident that we have not as yet learned to die to ourselves, and that the love of honour is as deeply rooted in our hearts as our grief is lasting and excessive.

On the Means of subduing Ambition

1. A Religious should endeavour to love self-contempt—to renounce all honour—the praise, esteem, and affection of creatures, and to acknowledge herself unworthy of them. The truly humble soul believes that whatever good she possesses is the gratuitous gift of God, and therefore, that to Him alone all praise is due; that of herself she is only sin and nothingness, and consequently only deserving of contempt. "Humility," says St. Francis de Sales, "assimilates us to the beggar, who considers himself the poorest of men; thus the truly humble man is persuaded that no one is so vile and contemptible as himself."

2. A Religious should hate and avoid as much as possible the praise and esteem of men. When praised

make immediately an interior act of self-contempt; never omit any act of piety to please others; seek always the lowest place; rejoice when others are preferred to you; lead a hidden life, and conceal from others as much as possible your good works. "If, by the grace of God," said St. Francis de Sales, "I have ever performed any act of virtue, or been instrumental in any good work, I would prefer on the day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, that this good action were known to God alone, and that to all creatures should be made manifest the sins of my whole life."

3. A Religious should bear patiently accusations, calumnies, suspicions, rash judgments, affronts, disgrace, etc. He who is truly humble is not dismayed by such trials; on the contrary he believes that they are for his good, and he bears them all with peace and tranquillity of soul. St. Francis de Sales asks "Who is he that does not sin, and consequently does not deserve punishment?" Remember in the day of tribulation, that as you have offended God, it is but just that creatures should be the instruments of His Divine Justice to punish you for your sins. The practice of these three degrees is necessary to attain an intimate union with God.

4. A Religious should receive contempt with joy, and bear it with satisfaction. "O how pleasing and acceptable would humiliations be to us," says St. Frances de Sales, "had we a true solicitude for our eternal salvation! How precious would such opportunities be, which would afford us a means of exercising ourselves continually in a virtue so agreeable to God!"

Fourth Day

FIRST EXAMEN

On the Passions of Sloth and Sadness

BESIDES inordinate Love and Ambition, there are two other passions which to many Religious are no small impediment in the way of virtue, and which, if not completely subdued, would destroy the whole edifice of perfection. These are Sloth and Sadness; passions which, inasmuch as they appear harmless, are so much the more pernicious to the soul as we do not consider them in their true light. Now, seriously examine in the presence of God the dispositions of your heart with regard to those two passions.

Characteristics of Sloth or Tepidity

Sloth or Tepidity may be defined, a certain languor or sluggishness of soul, which leads us to omit those acts of virtue and religion which are necessary for perfection, or to perform them negligently. The evils resulting from this passion are innumerable, and serious in their consequences. The worst of all is, that the tepid Religious loses all relish for spiritual things; she dreads making holy resolutions, and as to sanctity she considers it a thing too difficult for her and quite unattainable: hence, her life passes away in a state of continual Tepidity. That we may detect this passion let us consider its characteristics.

1. The Tepid Religious is wearied and disgusted

with spiritual duties. Tepidity is to the soul what infirmity is to the body. A sick person is unequal to the least exertion, she cannot make any for want of strength, and longs to retire to rest. So it is with the Tepid soul. She considers the time spent in prayer as a time of martyrdom; she begins her meditations, but cannot continue it with fervour, both on account of the aridity she feels, and the distractions which dissipate her mind; hence, she longs for the end of prayer. Her Examens are also made so superficially that she derives not the slightest benefit from them; she approaches the holy sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, the former without sorrow or purpose of amendment, the latter almost without faith, and without any feeling of devotion. In a word, she acquits herself of all her spiritual duties with disgust and Tepidity.

2. The Tepid Religious derives no advantage from spiritual duties. She approaches the Sacraments of Penance, but after many confessions cannot be said to have corrected one venial sin. She receives the Holy Communion, but after repeated Communions will not have subdued even one passion. After having meditated for a long time on the great truths of eternity, she will be as impatient and uncharitable as ever to her neighbour—as disobedient and insubordinate to her superiors—as dissipated,—as unmortified,—and as sensitive as ever, should the least word be said to her. What is the cause of all this? Tepidity! Jesus Christ tells us that "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away." Now, how can those secure heaven, who are thus enslaved to Sloth and Tepidity?

3. The Tepid Religious is continually making new resolutions, but never keeps one of them. This is a very common defect, and one which prevents many persons from attaining perfection. The Slothful soul may apply herself to acquire the virtue of humility, but what is the result? After a short time she will abandon it altogether, and become so proud, vain, and haughty, that she will not bear the least slight with patience. From the virtue of humility she will pass to that of meekness, but after a little time she will grow tired of this also, and prove by her conduct that she cannot receive the least affront without yielding to anger and resentment. The continual violence which must be done to nature in order to subdue the different passions, and acquire their opposite virtues is a work too tiresome and difficult for the Slothful Religious: hence, she is always abandoning her resolutions—making new ones, and keeping none. The consequence of this fickleness and irresolution is, that at the end of twenty or thirty years such persons will have acquired little more virtue than they had when they first entered the cloister.

4. The Tepid Religious leads an idle and dissipated life. It may be said of a soul in whom this bad passion predominates, that she has no distinctive mark by which she can be known to be a Religious. She is a stranger to interior recollection—neglects the exercise of the presence of God—allows her thoughts to wander freely in every direction—hates silence and loves idle talk—being wholly taken up with exterior things, she altogether neglects to attend to her interior—she is so careless and negligent in all her duties, that nothing of any importance can be entrusted to her—and she

allows herself such liberty of speech as to silence some, and censure the actions of others. St. Francis de Sales compares such persons to flies and mosquitos, because they do nothing but go through the convent, teazing and annoying every one.

On the Means of subduing Sloth or Tepidity

1. A Religious should endeavour to perform all her spiritual exercises, and more especially the duty of prayer, with love, fervour, and perseverance. Meditation is to a Religious what water is to fish. The latter cannot live out of their element, nor can the former lead a spiritual life, if she neglect the duty of prayer, which should be her chief employment, and that to which she should direct all the energies of her soul. A true Religious will never go to prayer without having first prepared her soul for this sacred duty; she will never yield to voluntary distractions, or shorten the time assigned for this or any other exercise of piety. It matters not whether her soul be in a state of interior consolation or desolation, in light or in darkness, in fervour or aridity, her heart is at all times and under every circumstance patient and resigned to the divine dispensations. What the Annals of the Society of Jesus relate of Father Cafaro is truly wonderful. The Devil made use of every means in his power to distract this young Religious during the time of his meditations. Among other stratagems, he one day assumed the form of a venomous serpent, he crept upon him, worked his way into the holy man's bosom, entwined himself around him, and thus endeavoured to disturb his interior recollection. But so far was Father Cafaro from interrupting his meditation for a

moment, that he did not even raise his hand to shake off the reptile.

2. A Religious should endeavour to perform her spiritual duties, not only with fervour and devotion, but also with profit. Those who have God alone in view do not seek spiritual consolations, but study to please Him, to amend their lives, and advance in virtue; from every exercise of piety they purpose to derive some spiritual advantage; during the time of meditation they resolve to practise such or such a virtue during the day, and are faithful in doing so. In approaching the Sacrament of Penance, they direct their attention to the avoidance and amendment of certain venial sins—in receiving the Holy Communion they never fail to make to Jesus Christ the sacrifice of some defect or passion, and earnestly beg grace to be faithful in the hour of temptation. They perform none of their spiritual duties superficially or through custom; in every action they endeavour to conquer some evil inclination and to advance in virtue. Those who persevere in acting thus may indeed be said to be solidly devout.

3. A Religious should persevere in her good resolutions until she shall have attained the virtue she is endeavouring to acquire. If, for instance, humility be the virtue selected, she should frequently ponder the motives on which this virtue is founded—she should endeavour, on every occasion, to mortify in herself both the desire of honour and hatred of contempt—make interior acts of humility with so great fervour that this virtue may not only regulate but shine forth in her general conduct—she should consider every opportunity afforded her of self-abasement as a special

favour bestowed on her by God, and profit by it. This should be her daily practice, until she will have learnt to bear humiliations, if not with joy, at least with peace of soul. We have a brilliant example of this in St. Francis of Sales, who, though naturally of a very lively and choleric temper, laboured so assiduously for twenty years to overcome it, as in the end to acquire that heroic charity and meekness which was so deservedly admired by the whole world.

4. A Religious should endeavour to advance in spiritual life by the practice of interior recollection. The truly spiritual soul is never idle, either interiorly or exteriorly ; by purity of intention she always tries to please God. She accepts adversity with humility and resignation and in prosperity is not elated, because she considers every good gift as coming from God. Hence, under every vicissitude of life, she is always interiorly recollected.

Fourth Day

SECOND EXAMEN

On Sadness

The love of God and Sadness are in their very nature diametrically opposed to each other. The love of God imparts joy, peace, and tranquillity to the soul; but Sadness fills it with disturbance, uneasiness, and discontent. Now tell me, can such opposite feelings dwell together in the same heart? Certainly not. If charity attain its perfection it must of necessity banish Sadness, which is so destructive to this virtue. We have only to read the lives of the Saints to be persuaded of this truth. They were as persevering in their efforts to acquire and preserve cheerfulness and peace of soul as they were careful to banish every feeling of Sadness from their hearts. Now, examine if this be one of your predominant passions, and if it be, endeavour to ascertain to what extent it pervades your general conduct.

Characteristics of Sadness

1. Sadness deprives the heart of happiness, and fills it with trouble and perplexity. Those who are subject to this passion are greatly to be pitied. A sudden fit of sadness seizes them, for which they cannot account. The understanding becomes clouded; the memory is harassed by a thousand melancholy thoughts and painful recollections; the most distressing imaginations

afflict the mind; contending affections torment the heart; and the whole soul is immersed in sorrow. They weep—they suspect every one—they do not consider any one their friend—and should they be kindly advised not to make any account of their foolish and groundless fancies they reject the friendly advice with disdain and peevishness, and their misery and disturbance of mind is only increased.

2. Sadness takes from the soul all devotion, and renders it unfit for communing with God. The person whose heart is oppressed with sorrow is incapable of feeling any sentiment of devotion, or of treating lovingly with God. The thoughts which agitate her mind withdraw it from Him, and the bitterness in which her heart is immersed makes it unfit to raise itself to God. This we learn from daily experience.

3. Sadness leads to the commission of many other faults, such as complaints, murmurs, and many other faults. A person under the influence of this passion is subject to many pitiable weaknesses. If she sees two persons speaking together in an undertone, she immediately suspects they must be talking about her; an unguarded word, or ungracious look, suffices to prevent her speaking to any one for an entire week; she is punctilious to the last degree, and takes offence at the merest trifles. In a word, she is a burden both to herself and others.

4. Sadness causes in the soul an incredible pusillanimity, which goes so far as to make her lose confidence in God. The baneful effect of this passion is to deprive man of every consolation, both human and divine. By losing confidence in God he loses that which alone could support him in adversity. St.

Frances of Rome was one day oppressed by great sadness; St. Onuphrius appeared to her and said, "Banish this sadness, my child, for a melancholy soul is not fitted for the exercises of an interior life. If you do not attend to my advice, you will gradually lose your fervour and devotion and ultimately fall into pusillanimity and despair."

On the Means of subduing Sadness

1. A Religious should always be ready and willing to receive from God whatever trials, interior or exterior, He may please to send her, and bear them for His love. Sadness or depression of mind arises from want of Indifference. If we could only learn to deny our own will, and accomplish the will of God, no trial, however great, could ever disturb or afflict us. Peace of soul is grounded on perfect Indifference, as to all the dispensations of God in our regard. To attain this holy Indifference two things are necessary. The first is, to believe implicitly that every trial comes direct to us from God, that He sends them for our greater good, and that He will never forsake those who humbly submit to the decrees of His adorable will. The second is, to abandon ourselves unreservedly to the will of God, and accept with Indifference all that he may please to ordain for us, either as to soul or body. We should be ready to say with St. Francis de Sales, "God knows how to dispose and regulate all events for my greater good. Let Him act as He pleases. My God, may Thy Will, not mine, be done. Great Father of Heaven, whatever pleases Thee will be pleasing to me; teach me to love Thy divine law, and engrave deeply on my heart the desire to accomplish

Thy adorable Will. Health and sickness, honour and contempt, life and death, are in Thy hands. Grant me, O Lord, such an efficacious grace, as to submit willingly and lovingly to all the dispensations of Thy sweet and adorable Providence."

2. A Religious should guard against yielding to Sadness, when in a state of suffering, either from interior or exterior causes. When oppressed by sadness, we should adopt the two following remedies, as the most efficacious means for mortifying this passion. First.—We should endeavour to banish every thought which could in the least disturb our peace of mind, and be convinced that things are often much worse in imagination than in reality. Second.—We ought to fix our thoughts on God, adore His holy will, cheerfully submit to the dispensations of His Providence, and be firmly resolved to bear generously whatever trials God may please to send us. We should persevere in this exercise, until our minds shall have regained their former peace and tranquillity.

3. A Religious should endeavour to bear every trial with interior peace. The truly patient soul never allows herself to be so depressed by adversities as to lose her peace of mind and unfit herself for conversing familiarly with God. In sufferings and tribulations she utters no complaint. She may, it is true, feel the weight of her cross, but, at the same time, she resigns herself entirely to the Divine Will, and endeavours to preserve that equanimity of soul which is the result of unbounded confidence in God.

From the following anecdote, we may infer what St. Francis de Sales thought of those who complain of the trials and calamities incident to life. A certain

ecclesiastic went to him one day to complain of an affront he had received. The Saint said, " I will not pour oil upon your wound lest it should increase the inflammation, but I will wash it with vinegar and rub it with salt. You have summed up all your complaints by adding that great virtue alone could bear such an insult in silence. Your stock of patience must be scanty indeed, since this offence has made so deep an impression on your heart." " Dear me ! " said the priest, " I have done nothing but confide my grievances to my Bishop,—to my father. To whom could a child have recourse in his sorrows, if not to the father he loves ? " " O my son, my poor child," said the Saint, " how long will you cling to the fooleries of childhood ? Would it be proper, think you, for the Pastor whom God has constituted a spiritual Father in His Church, to treat his spiritual children like infants, or for his sons to think and prattle like children, nay, even more foolishly if possible ? Do you wish that I should nurse and feed you like a baby, instead of giving you the healthy and invigorating food suited to your years ? It is quite evident you have not as yet learned to digest the hard crust of adversity." Thus far the Saint. From this anecdote we may learn what he thought of trials and contradictions, and what patience he required of those who were assailed by them. This degree of virtue is necessary for all who would attain to intimate union with God.

4. A Religious should bear adversities with joy. This is a sublime degree of virtue, and not to be attained without daily self-denial, profound humility, a long and persevering exercise of patience, and the special assistance of divine grace.

Fifth Day

EXAMEN

On Anger, and on false or intemperate Zeal

Words cannot express the evils arising to the soul from the passion of anger and false zeal, which are totally opposed to the love of our neighbour. As Christian perfection consists in the love of God and our neighbour, all our efforts for the attainment of perfection would be unavailing if we did not strenuously labour to eradicate these two passions from the heart. Those who are naturally of a hasty and choleric temper have in this passion a formidable and dangerous enemy to contend with. They can never be free from its tyranny, unless they are perpetually on the watch to stifle the first feelings of anger. It is not, however, impossible to conquer it. Many of the saints were by nature hasty and passionate, but they succeeded so well in overcoming themselves as to appear cold and phlegmatic. We must follow their example if we desire to attain perfection. But first let us examine the nature of this passion, and its baneful consequences.

Characteristics of Anger

1. Those in whom this vice predominates get into a passion even for the merest trifles. Some persons may be justly compared to gunpowder, which suddenly ignites if the least spark of fire fall upon it, and causes

a terrible explosion. So it is with a Religious who has not learned to govern her temper. A thoughtless word said in jest, and without the slightest intention to offend, suffices to put her in a violent passion.

2. Those in whom this vice predominates habitually break forth into hasty and injurious language, which not unfrequently leads to murmurs and complaints. Woe to the person who would say or do anything, even unintentionally, which could in the least offend them; they would immediately get into a rage with the unfortunate offender, pour upon her a torrent of abuse, everything evil of the offending party would be remembered and bitterly retorted; in a word, there would be an outpouring of all the venom in the heart. Not satisfied with this, they would make the whole convent resound with their complaints and murmurs, and, cost what it might, they would avenge their imaginary wrongs.

3. Those in whom this vice predominates, not unfrequently entertain feelings of anger for a long time in the heart. Vast is the difference between the blaze caused by a bundle of straw, and that of a log of wood. The former bursts at once into a flame and vanishes; the latter ignites very gradually, burns slowly, does not emit great flames, but, when once on fire, retains its heat for a long time. There are some who are easily carried away by anger; they get into a violent passion, which, for the time being, causes great commotion; in less than an hour, however, they are pacified, and as good friends as ever with those who have offended them. Others there are in whom this passion has taken deeper root; the fire that burns within them is slow and hidden; but they feed it

with a thousand thoughts of revenge, contempt, and ill-will, which they deliberately entertain, and which at last end in feelings of dislike and aversion, which last for weeks, and sometimes even for months.

4. Those in whom this vice predominates often entertain feelings of dislike or antipathy for certain persons, and this is one of the most pernicious effects produced by anger. They indulge feelings of dislike which they never can resolve to overcome or banish from their hearts—as long as they live they hate those who have offended them—always speak ill of them—can never prevail on themselves to show them any mark of affection, or be induced to treat them with either kindness or affability.

On the Means of Subduing Anger

1. A Religious should never indulge feelings of ill-will or resentment for any one ; she should cultivate so friendly a feeling for all mankind as to be united to all by the bonds of the most sincere charity. When any feelings of anger arise in her heart she should immediately repress them, and never desist until she has completely subdued them. St. Francis de Sales says we should entertain a kindly feeling for every one, especially for those who have injured or offended us, because by so doing we love our neighbour with a disinterested love, and solely with a view to do the Will of God. This love is so much the more excellent and meritorious, as it is more pure, and freer from every human motive.

2. A Religious should suppress even the first emotion of anger, which is the only way to subdue this passion, and acquire meekness, its opposite virtue. She should

consider every occasion afforded her of overcoming the rising emotions of anger as a special favour bestowed on her by God, and be faithful in corresponding with His grace, by courageously conquering herself. By this means she will acquire that self-control, meekness and patience, which are the characteristics of true sanctity. Let her remember, that without the opportunities of mortifying the passion of anger, she can never acquire these virtues. St. Francis de Sales says, some persons are all meekness as long as everything succeeds with them, but if they are put out of their way ever so little, like those mountains spoken of by the Psalmist, the instant they are touched they smoke, or like embers covered with ashes, they cease not to burn. No great effort is needful to be good with the good, or saintly with saints, but the exercise of solid virtue consists in bearing with the defects of our neighbour, and speaking with kindness to those who injure us.

3. A Religious should bear affronts sweetly and lovingly, never complain of them or excuse herself, and be silent when rashly judged, falsely accused, or calumniated. This is great virtue, but it is still greater virtue, if at the very moment we are offended, and feel passion rising within us, we resolutely check its first emotions, and treat the offender with kindness and affability. We cannot read without admiration the following anecdote of St. Francis de Sales. He was one day insolently accosted by a vicious and ungrateful man (for whom he had gone bail), who gave him all manner of abuse. To his bitter invectives, the Saint meekly replied, "I fear, Sir, I may have unintentionally offended you; if so, I am willing

to make you every reparation in my power, and in such a way, too, that I trust you will be fully satisfied. Allow me, therefore, with all sincerity, to assure you, that were I, through you, to lose my reputation, which is as dear to me as the apple of my eye, I would, nevertheless, love you, and rank you amongst the number of my best and dearest friends." How would you have acted on a similar occasion?

4. A Religious should love those who injure her, and return good for evil. Those who love their neighbour purely in and for God will find no difficulty in the practice of this virtue. The motives for loving friends and enemies being the same, they will, by persevering efforts, learn so to govern their hearts, as to regard both with equal affection. St. Francis de Sales succeeded so well in this practice, that it was to him a continual source of pleasure and delight. In reply to an intimate friend, who one day owned to him that he found that point of the law of God, commanding us to love our enemies, very difficult in practice, the Saint said, "For my part I know not how my heart is formed, or whether it is different from that of other creatures, because I not only do not find any difficulty in this precept, but I feel so much delight and pleasure in practising it, that were God to forbid me to love my enemies, I should find such an obedience very hard." From this we may conclude that we cannot attain to union with God, but by these means which will infallibly lead to it.

Sixth Day

EXAMEN

On False or Intemperate Zeal

False or Intemperate Zeal is a bad and very malignant passion, which conceals itself under the appearance of virtue. Like a wolf in sheep's clothing, it devours the flock it pretends to guard. Those under the influence of this passion can talk of nothing but Rule, Regular Observance, Virtue, Sanctity, Perfection, and yet these very persons are enemies to peace and union, and cause others to commit innumerable sins and imperfections. We will now consider in detail the pernicious effects produced by this passion.

Characteristics of False or Intemperate Zeal

1. A Religious whose predominant passion is false zeal makes very little account of her own defects, and magnifies those of others. The truly zealous and charitable Religious is not content with the superficial practice of virtue; she keeps her mind recollected, watches over every rising emotion of passion, and makes great account of the least imperfection. If she commit a venial offence, or is guilty of the slightest infidelity she is filled with sorrow and confusion, and endeavours to atone for it with as much earnestness as if she had committed a grievous offence. Zeal which has not these characteristics cannot be called true Zeal; it is the offspring of anger and

pride. False Zeal is the fruitful parent of many sins and defects, such, for example, as suspicions, rash judgments, disobedience, dissensions, obstinacy, criticising the conduct of Superiors, distractions and negligence in the duty of prayer, and in the discharge of other exercises of piety, impatience, anger and offensive words, etc., etc., etc.; but of all these defects the False Zealot makes little or no account. "O God!" exclaimed St. Frances de Sales, "when shall we learn to bear patiently the faults of our neighbour? We expect that others should make allowances for our defects and weaknesses, which we always consider trivial, while we magnify those of our neighbour, and find them intolerable. We scrutinize their conduct with the eyes of a lynx, and are blind as bats with regard to our own, while we deceive ourselves with the idea that we are actuated purely by Zeal. Ah! were we really so, we should overlook a multitude of sins in others, and fix our attention on our own, to atone for the least of which, we should be willing, if necessary, even to shed our blood." Such are the sentiments of St. Francis de Sales. Happy those who profit by them.

2. A Religious whose predominant passion is False Zeal requires heroic acts of virtue from others, while she herself does not practise even ordinary virtue. O God! how many defects does this vice engender. These Zealots are ever ready to judge and criticise the conduct of Superiors, but expect Superiors to love and treat them with kindness and affability; they censure the actions of their Sisters, but expect that every one will connive at their defects, and bear with meekness to be criticised by them; they insult and

outrage the feelings of all, without distinction of persons, and yet are offended if their calumnies are not patiently heard. Now, do not such persons require others to be saints, while they themselves are altogether devoid of every virtue? Let us only observe how they act, when anything is required of them which they require of others; when they are received by a Superioress with coldness or reserve —pained by some remark which they consider severe —silenced or justly reproved—how do they practise that virtue they so rigorously exact of others?

3. A Religious whose predominant passion is False Zeal, would reform and correct others, but cannot bear a slight admonition herself. Some are so wanting in moderation, discretion, and meekness, that they cannot make any allowance for the weaknesses of their neighbour, nor can they wait for a seasonable time or opportunity to correct them—they are ill-timed and precipitate in everything they do—observe every trivial fault in their Sisters—and would have them sharply and severely reprimanded. Those, however, who are so rigorous to others, are equally indulgent to themselves, and would be greatly pained should any one venture to accuse, admonish, or contradict them. St. Francis de Sales, speaking of such persons, says, they resemble the Pharisees, who, according to the testimony of Jesus Christ, "bind heavy burdens, and grievous to carry, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with a finger."—*Matt.* xxiii. 4. O False Zeal, how detestable art thou! This passion, if not mortified, increases with years, and often accompanies its victim to the grave. To such persons may be well applied

the words of our Redeemer, " Physician, cure thyself. Cast out first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye."—*Matt.* vii. 5.

4. A Religious whose predominant passion is False Zeal is the occasion of many more sins in others, than those she wishes to correct. This may require explanation. Four things are chiefly necessary for the well-being of a Religious house; namely, respect and obedience to Superiors—mutual charity—constant peace and union in the intercourse of the Sisters with each other—and the spirit of prayer and recollection. Where these virtues reign, a Religious house may be considered a paradise. The Religious who is carried away by Intemperate Zeal, seems to make little or no account of these virtues. She censures at will the conduct of Superiors, and thus offends obedience and respect for authority—she watches and condemns the actions of her Sisters, here too, she offends against charity—she insults the Sisters in her intercourse with them and in their absence ridicules them, what then has become of peace and union ?—and where is the spirit of prayer and interior recollection if her mind is filled with sinful and idle thoughts, and her heart void of love and compassion ? A spirit of recollection, mutual charity, strict silence with regard to the faults of others, unalterable meekness and invincible patience in contradictions, are the most certain means to succeed in reforming a Religious house. Intemperate Zeal, instead of remedying, often increases the evil. The Religious who is actuated by it in her desire of doing good may be likened to a mason who would

make twenty openings in the roof of a house to mend one. This idea is taken from the works of St. Francis de Sales and daily experience attests the truth of it. No good can result from rigour, contention, or censoriousness, whereas all may be effected by discretion and charity, which would make us feel for others as for ourselves, and not impose burdens upon them, which we would be unwilling they should impose upon us.

On the Means of correcting False or Intemperate Zeal

1. A Religious should never deliberately fix her thoughts but on God—what belongs to His service—or to her own spiritual advantage. Whoever desires to acquire interior peace and the spirit of recollection should have neither eyes nor ears for anything that does not concern her. She should attend to nothing but her own perfection and the duties obedience may impose upon her. She ought to be as regardless of the actions, conduct, defects, and weaknesses of others, as of the affairs which are being transacted in the court of the emperor of China. Those who reduce this advice to practice will infallibly and in a very short time gain that peace and tranquillity of soul, which they would otherwise in vain seek to acquire.

2. A Religious should bear patiently the faults of her Sisters, and neither reprove nor admonish them unless a favourable opportunity present itself. In doing this, two defects are to be avoided.

First.—She should not condemn any person, nor mention their faults, except to those who have it in their power to correct them.

Second.—She should never reprove any of the Sisters, even in private, if they are not disposed to listen to her or not likely to profit by the admonition.

St. Francis de Sales, writing on this subject, says, "I would not recommend that a person be admonished for every fault she may commit. Reason and charity require that this should not be done until the mind is in a state to receive the correction with profit. Intemperate Zeal rather retards than advances the perfection of our neighbour. It is certain that those who try to do everything at once, will not succeed in doing anything well; they will often tarnish what they intended to polish."

3. When a Religious perceives that an admonition will be profitable, she ought to give it, by all means, but with great meekness, suavity, and charity. "Charity," says St. Francis de Sales, "is ever kind and compassionate." Those who by their office are obliged to correct the faults of others, should temper their reprimands with great sweetness and charity, otherwise their correction will be to the delinquent, what unripe fruit is to the stomach, which injures rather than serves it. The test of true charity is to correct others with as much lenity and gentleness as possible. Now, if the Saint required so much meekness from Superiors, who, in virtue of their office, are bound to correct the faults of their subjects, what would he not require from those who have not the same obligation?

4. A Religious should make known to her Superioress the faults she may perceive in any of the Sisters, with a view to have them remedied, if she foresees she cannot herself admonish them, without giving

pain or offence. To correct the faults of their subjects is always a painful task for Superiors, who should be guided by great prudence in the discharge of this onerous duty; not so with subjects—they are free to admonish their sisters with all charity, if they can do so without giving offence. If, however, this be not practicable, they ought to make known to their Superioress any serious faults they may have observed, and then remain in peace, begging of God to enlighten all parties, and to enkindle in their hearts the fire of His divine love.

EXAMENS

FOR THE ILLUMINATIVE AND UNITIVE STATES

Seventh Day

On the Love of God

To love God and to be perfect is one and the same thing. "As for me," exclaimed St. Francis de Sales, "I know of no other perfection than that of loving God above all things, and my neighbour as myself for the love of Him. Every other virtue without this would be false." Charity is the bond of union which unites us to God and our neighbour. In the practice of this virtue, strictly speaking, consists the attainment of our last end. It is the summit of perfection, and whoever proposes to herself any perfection not grounded on charity, is grossly deluded. This is a point of the greatest importance in spiritual life, and you should examine seriously the degrees which lead to it, that you may be animated to aspire to the perfection of this lovely virtue.

The four first Degrees of the Love of God

1. A Religious should avoid and detest the slightest venial sin more than any other evil, nay, even more than death itself. The hatred and flight of sin is an incontestable proof of the perfect love of God reigning in the soul. Those who love God

perfectly, seldom, perhaps not even once in a month, commit a deliberate venial sin; if they have the misfortune to do so, they are truly contrite, and endeavour to make satisfaction to the Divine Justice by every means in their power. When any one told the Venerable Father Nicholas Lancisius that he loved God with his whole heart, he immediately said, "Do you endeavour to avoid venial sin?" If the person answered in the affirmative, the holy man exclaimed with joy, "O now indeed I must admit you truly love God."

2. A Religious should give her heart so entirely to God, as never deliberately to entertain the least feeling of any inordinate passion. So great is the purity of the perfect love of God, that it cannot endure anything in the least displeasing to Him; it represses every feeling of the heart by which God could be offended. However imperceptible the emotions arising from the passions of love, anger, or pride may be, perfect love immediately subdues them, so that during the whole day nothing is allowed to enter the heart which could in the slightest degree sully it, or offend the eyes of the Beloved.

3. A Religious should abandon herself totally into the hands of God, to be guided and governed by Him, and she should faithfully correspond with all the inspirations of Divine Grace. It would be impossible to love God perfectly, and refuse Him any sacrifice He may require. Those who are unfaithful to Divine Grace are sadly mistaken if they hope to persevere in His holy love; because God will at length cease to speak to the soul by His secret inspirations—He will abandon her at last to her own blind designs,

and to the bent of her evil inclinations—the ardour of her love for Him will gradually diminish—and through her own fault she will be deprived of those choice graces which she otherwise would have received. The blessed Armelle, after having for many years been favoured with heavenly lights, and enjoyed the most intimate and uninterrupted communication with God, one day prolonged her conversation with a friend beyond what necessity or charity required. God warned her interiorly to break off the discourse, which had already lasted too long, but she heeded not the admonition. What was the consequence ? To punish her for this fault or infidelity, He deprived her of His divine presence and sweet familiarity, to which He did not restore her until after a long time spent in sighs and tears.

4. A Religious should make the Divine Will the sole motive of all her actions. It is no very difficult task after all to purify the intention in our daily actions, and to renew the offering of them to God ; but to keep the heart so disposed, that He who penetrates the secrets of hearts may see that in every thing we really seek nothing but the accomplishment of His Divine Will, and that on every occasion we cheerfully submit to it, is indeed the act of a perfect soul, who is entirely dead to herself, and solidly established in the love of God.

Four other Degrees of the Love of God

5. A Religious should bear daily contradictions in silence and for the love of God, and adore in them the Infinite Wisdom and Goodness of God. This is a most important point in spiritual life. For if we

accept these daily contradictions as coming from God, and bear them in silence and with love, we perform an heroic act of charity, which immediately disposes the soul for attaining the perfection of this divine virtue. It is certain that God will not unite a soul to Himself, or elevate her to an eminent degree of Divine Love, unless she be adorned with every virtue, and have prepared for Him a worthy habitation in her heart. Now, we cannot acquire the virtues without practising them, and as sufferings are the best means to advance in these, God, in order to purify and embellish the soul, permits her to be daily subjected to trials and contradictions—to contempt, that she may acquire humility—to sharp and offensive words, that she may exercise herself in the virtue of meekness—to harsh and unreasonable commands, that she may learn to obey—to unkindness and aversions, that charity may be perfected in her—to sickness and bodily pain, that she may have an opportunity of practising patience—and, finally, to interior trials, that she may submit with resignation to the Divine Will. Such is the ordinary conduct of God with regard to those whom He destines for intimate union with Himself. If in the midst of these sufferings the soul withdraws her thoughts from creatures and fixes them steadily upon God, humbly adoring in her trials the hidden and admirable ways of His infinite Wisdom and Goodness, accepting and bearing all with patience and in silence, she has already attained *one* of the highest degrees of charity, and may entertain a well-grounded hope, that God will ultimately raise her to the highest degree of Divine Love.

6. A Religious should ardently desire to be united to God. When the soul shall have undergone with courage and fidelity the trials to which we have just alluded, and borne them with patience and resignation, she will then begin to experience the special effects of Divine Grace. God will impart to her new lights in prayer, will become Himself her Master, and instruct her in the eternal truths—she will feel so inflamed with holy affections, that hours will pass like moments—she will find God without difficulty, because He is always present within her—and her interior intercourse with Him will be long and continual. The passions being now entirely under the dominion of reason and religion, her soul may be said to enjoy a continual peace, repose, and tranquillity. In this state a vehement desire is enkindled within her to love God in the most perfect manner, to be closely united to Him, and to enjoy Him eternally; and this desire is sometimes so strong and impetuous, that it cannot be confined within just bounds. It often made the blessed Armelle appear as if she had lost her senses. She would run through the groves and meadows, cling to the trees, and make the valleys and mountains resound with her sighs and loving exclamations. "Where is my Beloved, where shall I find Him whom my soul loves, and who is my only happiness and delight?" Although it does not always happen, that those who have attained this degree of charity, or the love of God, are equally impetuous in their desires, their hearts are, however, equally fixed on God, to whom they incessantly unite themselves, and for the possession of whom they ardently sigh. These are certain marks by which we

may judge that God desires to take up His permanent abode in their hearts.

7. A Religious should be faithful to God when He withdraws Himself from her, and bear with great humility and resignation the subtraction of Divine Grace. Until we are dead to ourselves and cannot find peace or happiness but in the accomplishment of the Will of God, we can never hope to enjoy the copious influx of Divine Grace, or that God will permanently establish the reign of His love in our hearts. God conceals Himself from the soul, and depriving her at the same time of all light, leaves her surrounded by the thickest darkness. Meditation, which before was her delight, is now irksome, she cannot apply to it without extreme difficulty; in a word, such is the aridity, such the combats she has to sustain, that her state may indeed be called a martyrdom. Those feelings of tender devotion and those ardent desires which formerly attracted her to God are gone, and she no longer feels herself drawn to Himself by any sentiment of piety. The recollection of the presence of God, which was formerly her greatest delight and happiness, and which kept her soul in continual peace, is also gone, and if by doing great violence to herself, she succeeds in regaining a sense of His divine presence, she no longer finds in it either pleasure or satisfaction. The soul in this state is immersed in an ocean of bitterness, for Heaven does not impart to her one ray of consolation, nor can she seek any on earth, without being unfaithful to her heavenly Spouse. This state of anguish and interior desolation is, however, ordained for her greater good, that, being deprived of every earthly consolation, she

may place her whole happiness in doing solely and purely the will of God.

8. A Religious should bear all interior trials with great humility, and be faithful to God as long as He shall please to leave her in a state of suffering. When God makes choice of a soul with a view to raise her to a high degree of Divine Love, He does not usually confine her sufferings to the interior darkness or desolation we have just described. He, moreover, sends her other trials, incomparably greater and more painful to nature than can be described or imagined ; such as disgust for all spiritual exercises, and even for the practice of virtue—the revolt of all the passions and evil inclinations—an inability to converse with God in prayer—to do the least good work—to have recourse to Him—or to perform for His love the most trivial act of virtue. This, however, is not all. She is violently assailed by temptations against the virtue of purity, which often last, not only for hours, but even for entire days and nights : and which leave her no repose, immersed as she is in a sea of sufferings, caused by the danger in which she sees herself, every moment, of falling into sin. She also feels within her such anger against God, that it seems to her she hates Him mortally—she is tempted to utter against Him such horrible blasphemies, as the demons themselves would not dare to utter—she is oppressed with such an extreme sadness and pusillanimity as to be driven almost to despair. To all these interior trials are added many exterior sufferings, such as contempt—persecutions—bodily pains and sickness, which fill to overflowing her chalice of afflictions. You will, perhaps, think that no state on earth can be more wretched

and miserable than that of such a soul; far from being so, it is one of the happiest and most enviable. If God do not lead the soul to union with Himself, by means of sufferings, many years will elapse before she can attain to it; but the soul whom He conducts by this rugged path will very soon attain to an intimate union with her Sovereign Good, for the great efforts she is obliged to make, in order to resist and overcome the violence of her temptations, purify her soul in so short a time, as to merit for her the privilege of being admitted to the purest and most familiar intercourse with her heavenly Spouse. The soul, when in this state of interior desolation, ought to be very faithful in observing the following practices.

First.—She should never omit any of her accustomed devotions, nor shorten the time allotted for them, although it may seem to her she is only losing her time; she should remember that the time of aridity is a time of great profit and advantage to the soul.

Second.—She should never omit her accustomed penances or mortifications, or refuse to God any sacrifice He may require of her.

Third.—She should not neglect the exercise of the presence of God, however distasteful or even useless it may seem to her.

Fourth.—She should abandon herself entirely into the hands of God, and frequently protest to Him that she is willing to remain in this state until death, if such be His holy Will.

Fifth.—She should endeavour to cultivate a truly filial and unbounded confidence in God. The more the Devil labours to discourage her, the greater should be her confidence that God will never abandon

her, and that He will assuredly in the end unite her intimately to Himself.

Sixth.—She should tend continually to God and to His holy love with all her strength, in spite of all her repugnance, even though she may be apparently repulsed by Him.

Seventh.—She should with great candour and simplicity manifest the state of her soul to her director —obey implicitly—and submit to his judgment, however opposed it may be to her own. Without this entire submission, it would be utterly impossible for her to avoid the snares and deceits of the Devil. If the soul be faithful, and courageously bear her trials, there can be no doubt she will infallibly attain the most intimate union with God.

The four last and highest Degrees of the Love of God.

9. A Religious should always consider God as dwelling in the centre of her heart, and love Him incessantly—this is what may be termed union with God. In this state her understanding is enlightened by supernatural lights, by means of which she discovers God, not only present within her, but so intimately present, that during entire days and weeks she is occupied in the continual contemplation of Him, not only without any effort, but with the greatest interior delight. Her will is likewise so inflamed with the desire of belonging entirely to God, that her soul is constantly united to Him by the most ardent and loving affections. This union and interior intercourse of the soul with God, however intimate and continual does not hinder her from complying with the duties of

her state, of which she acquits herself with the utmost perfection, both with regard to God and her neighbour. We cannot but admire what is related in the Annals of the Society of Jesus, of two celebrated Fathers, James Alvarez, Provincial of Peru, and Peter Coton, confessor of Henry IV., King of France. The union of both these souls with God in their respective employments, which necessarily brought them in perpetual contact with the world, was truly admirable. Father Alvarez, during the space of twenty-five years, never lost sight of the divine presence; and Father Coton, during the last ten years of his life, received the singular grace of keeping his heart united to God even during sleep, so that whether he watched or slept, he was at all times inflamed with the most ardent love of God.

10. A Religious should always, and on every occasion, do that which is most perfect, and which she believes to be most pleasing to God. I say *always*, as there is no great difficulty in doing so for one or even for several days, because those who are not yet purified from their imperfections may easily succeed in doing this; but to persevere with fidelity for months and years, is the special privilege of those favoured souls, who have already attained to a high degree of Divine Love and intimate union with God. St. Jane Frances Fremiot de Chantal never undertook any affair until she had first ascertained, either through her superiors, or by the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, what was most perfect. When on some occasions she was in doubt, and unable to ascertain what was most pleasing to God, she would raise her heart to him and say, "Lord, show that

Thou art my God, by making known to me Thy holy Will, and with Thy grace I will prove that I am Thy creature by faithfully accomplishing it."

11. A Religious should have a great desire to suffer for God—she should consider every trial as a special grace bestowed upon her, and accept it with love and thanksgiving. Such is the disposition of a soul who has already attained to a sublime degree of the perfect love of God and intimate union with Him. To suffer afflictions with joy, and to desire them when withheld, is the privilege of the Saints and the characteristic of the true lovers of God. Sufferings are the precious gifts, which Jesus Christ imparts to those on whom He lavishes the richest treasures of His Divine Love. Jesus Christ, one day appeared to Blessed Margaret, Duchess of Savoy, and presented to her three tablets, on the first was written *Contempt*, on the second *Sickness*, and on the third *Persecutions*. Undismayed by the offer, the Saint generously said, "Lord, if it be pleasing to Thee, I will accept all."

12. A Religious should entirely renounce her own will, and on every occasion be guided solely by the Will of God. To this Degree of Perfection no one can attain, unless God, by a special trait of His mercy, raise the soul to it. St. Francis de Sales, speaking of this state, says, First.—Such a soul is so totally forgetful of self, and so free from all solicitude, that with perfect indifference of heart she leaves herself entirely at the disposal of the divine Will. Whatever afflictions befall her, she accepts them from God, she praises and blesses His infinite Goodness in sending them, and allows Him to work in her according to His

good pleasure without uttering a single complaint. Second.—Such a soul is dead to herself. She is so disposed interiorly as to have no desire—no preference even, for any virtue, only inasmuch as God, who regulates every thing in her, may require it of her. This sublime degree of divine Love, can only be understood by those who have attained it—they alone are capable of describing its effects.

Eighth Day

EXAMEN

On the Love of our Neighbour

The Love of God and the Love of our neighbour are inseparable. "These two loves," says St. Gregory, "are two rings, but when united, they form one chain: they are two actions, but one virtue; two works, but one charity; two merits in the sight of God, but one cannot exist without the other. They are, as another master of spiritual life expresses it, two flames, which ascend from the same fire; two rivulets, which spring from the one source; two branches, growing on the same tree; two children of the one mother. If you would ascertain the extent of your love for God, examine how much you love your neighbour. Both these virtues are great; they spring forth, increase, and are perfected together. Now examine yourself seriously on the different degrees of this exalted virtue, and see what progress you have made in it.

First Degree of the Love of our Neighbour

The first degree of the Love of our Neighbour, like that of the Love of God, is never to offend him in thought, word, or deed. The effects which charity produces in the heart are the following:—

1. Never to despise our neighbour under any circumstances whatever. The truly charitable Religious sees no defect in her neighbour, or if she do, she immediately withdraws her mind from it. In her

neighbour she views the image, the friend, and the child of God; and, therefore, she rejects with horror every thought which could in the least be injurious to him.

2. Never to judge disadvantageously of any one. The truly charitable Religious never dwells on the defects of her neighbour, unless duty obliges her to do so; she commits the judgment of them to God, to whom alone all judgment belongs. Whoever is negligent in this practice, proves that she is very regardless of her perfection. "Those," says St. Francis de Sales, "who try to preserve purity of conscience, are rarely guilty of a rash judgment; but the negligent soul acts very differently, she is as sharp-sighted as a lynx in censuring the actions of her neighbour, and as blind as a bat with regard to her own faults."

3. Never to misconstrue the actions of others. It would be as impossible for a Religious leading an interior and recollected life, and having communication with God, to take pleasure in censuring or misinterpreting the actions of others, as it would be for a person gifted with a solid judgment and common sense to interfere with other people's affairs. Persons who act thus must be wanting either in sense—in virtue—or in both. St. Francis de Sales says, "If one action could admit of a hundred interpretations, we should always consider it in the most favourable point of view; if we cannot excuse the action, we should at least excuse the intention; if this likewise be inexcusable, we should attribute the fault to the violence of temptation—to ignorance—or to inadvertence, etc."

4. Never to complain of, or calumniate others, nor mention their defects or weaknesses in their absence. Charity is silent, and never speaks of the faults of others except to those whose duty it is to correct them.

Second Degree of the Love of our Neighbour

A Religious should have a cordial and sincere love for her neighbour. This is the basis of true charity, the effects of which are :—

1. Never to entertain any feelings of anger or aversion for any one. "We are not required," says St. Francis de Sales, "to have a tender and sensible affection for all, as this is not in our power. We meet with a great diversity of characters, for many of whom we may feel a natural antipathy, but this should not prevent us cultivating a kind and friendly feeling for every one. We shall succeed in doing this by fidelity in observing the two following practices : First.—Never to allow any feeling of aversion or anger towards our neighbour to take possession of our hearts, and should we happen to fall into this fault, we should immediately repent and make atonement for it by a fervent act of charity. Second.—We should always desire most sincerely that our neighbour may enjoy every blessing and happiness, and be always ready and willing to render him every service in our power.

2. To rejoice at the prosperity of our neighbour. Charity so expands the heart as to make it embrace the whole family of mankind ; it causes us to rejoice as much at the prosperity of others as at our own, and to thank and praise God for the favours He has bestowed upon them.

3. To compassionate our neighbour in his afflictions.

Those who see their neighbour sick, afflicted, abandoned, suffering, or in any other distress, and do not compassionate, and relieve them if in their power, and pray for them, are grossly deceived if they flatter themselves that they possess true charity, for the heart that is callous or devoid of compassion, must also be devoid of charity.

4. Never to yield to feelings of envy at the prosperity of the neighbour. Envy and jealousy are the offspring of pride and self-love; joy and pleasure at the prosperity of others are the effects and characteristics of humility and true charity. Both exist in the hearts of those who rejoice when others are more loved, praised, and esteemed than themselves.

Third Degree of the Love of our Neighbour

We should endeavour to live in union and charity with all, and promote these virtues in others. A Religious house in which these two virtues flourish, may be justly called a paradise on earth. God cannot bestow a greater blessing on a Religious Community, than to draw to it members who are lovers of peace and concord, and who endeavour to promote these virtues in all around them. The effects produced are the following:—

1. Not to be obstinate in maintaining our own opinions. Many flatter themselves that they are endowed with great prudence, and, therefore, prefer their own opinions to those of others—they criticise the regulations of Superiors—imagine they were born to command and not to obey. As long as these ideas remain latent in the heart, there is no danger of discord or disunion; but if they become manifest,

many and great are the evils which invariably follow, such as pride, jealousy, and preference of ourselves to others. The simple obedience of a docile mind is of far more value than the active zeal of a proud and obstinate head. By submission of judgment we do much more good, both for ourselves and others, than by any other means. "Nothing can be more pernicious," says St. Francis de Sales, "to society, than a person whose leading defect is pride, and who is in the habit of contradicting every one. If such a person get admittance into a Religious house, she may be justly considered a plague—a torment to the community—and a disturber of the general peace and union. A docile and obedient Religious is loved and esteemed by every one."

2. To renounce our own will and do the will of others in all things not opposed to the Law of God and the rules of our peculiar Institute. This must necessarily be done by those who desire to live in peace in a Religious Community. The following anecdote, illustrative of our present subject, is related by St. Francis de Sales. One day a woman fell into the Tiber and was drowned. Her husband had the river dragged in direct opposition to the tide. The by-standers, who could not refrain from laughing, said to him, "Surely, man, if you want to find the body of your wife, you ought to follow the course of the stream, instead of going against it." "O dear, no," replied the widower. "It is quite evident you did not know my wife. From the day of our marriage she never would obey me, but always did her own will; it is, therefore, most probable that, although now dead, she has gone direct against the current of the river."

3. Never to relate to any one what has been said of him, unless it be to his advantage, and tend to promote mutual charity. There is scarcely any vice which causes so much exultation to the Devil as tale-bearing. Persons in the world consider it an act of kindness to repeat in confidence to a friend whatever evil others have said against him; but this is one of the six sins which God abhors.

Fourth Degree of the Love of our Neighbour

A Religious should never neglect any opportunity of doing good to her neighbour. Charity is kind; if this quality be wanting, it is not charity. The effects of this virtue are:—

1. Never to omit an opportunity of performing an act of charity for our neighbour, especially when called upon to do so. In order to do this, we must animate our Faith and believe that whatever we do for our neighbour we do for Jesus Christ; if we believe this, we can find no difficulty in doing him a service. What heart could have refused any favour asked by Jesus Christ whilst He lived on earth? Now, whatever service our neighbour asks of us, we should consider as asked by Jesus Christ Himself.

2. We should not only assist our neighbour in his wants and necessities when asked, but we should do so unasked, on every occasion which may present itself. The effects of fire and charity are similar: the former when it bursts forth into a conflagration spreads in all directions and consumes everything within its reach,—the latter expands the heart and fills it with benevolence for all mankind.

3. We should compassionate our neighbour in

his infirmities, afflictions, and trials, visit him frequently, and try to alleviate his sufferings to the utmost of our power. You would do well to adopt the sentiments of St. Francis de Sales with regard to the sick. When writing to a person who was ill, he thus expressed himself: "As long as you are stretched on the bed of suffering, I shall consider it my duty to respect you as one visited by God and clothed with His livery, and I will revere you as His chosen spouse. If Jesus Christ, while hanging on the cross, was declared *King* even by His enemies, those who by sufferings are fastened to the cross with Him, may justly be styled *Queens*. Perhaps you are not aware that we are objects of envy to the holy angels, because we can suffer for God, and they cannot." Such were the sentiments of the Saint with regard to the sick; you would do well to adopt them, for if you were sick, you would most certainly desire that others should feel thus tenderly for you.

Fifth Degree of the Love of our Neighbour

A Religious should compassionate the faults and defects of her neighbour, bear them with patience, and return good for evil. The effects of this Degree of Charity are:—

1. To bear in silence and with meekness whatever injuries we may receive from others. To do this, two things are necessary. First.—We should never manifest any angry feeling against those who have offended or injured us, but in our intercourse with them, preserve great serenity of countenance, and speak to them with the utmost kindness and affability.

Second.—We should bear in silence whatever injury we may receive from others.

2. We should love those who have injured or offended us. To succeed in this, we should immediately repress every feeling of anger and dislike which may arise within us, and by frequent acts of charity, strengthen our love for those who may have injured or offended us.

3. We should seek every opportunity of returning good for evil. This is one of the most exalted virtues which can be practised in this life. When a Religious has attained to this degree of charity, and that she is habitually actuated by it, we may affirm with certainty that the Holy Spirit dwells in her heart, and that she has acquired the perfection of this great virtue.

It now only remains for the Religious to apply herself seriously to the practice of the virtues, as inculcated in this little treatise. By doing so, her understanding will be enlightened on the doctrine herein set forth, and her will excited to pursue the practice of the virtues, not with indifference, but with perfection, and thus secure her eternal salvation, which was the end our author proposed to himself, and to which every true follower of Jesus Christ should likewise direct all his efforts. Reading much and knowing much will never sanctify the soul, but a life practically influenced by the truths of Faith, animated by Hope, and perfected by Charity, will most assuredly lead to the attainment of the most eminent sanctity. *Hoc fac et vives.*

THE END

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